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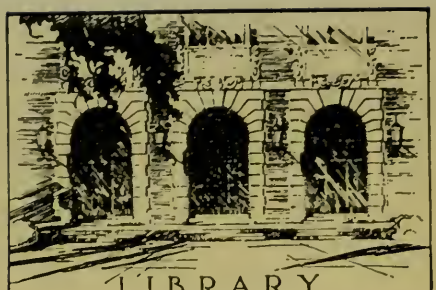

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WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE

By A. M. Donelan

AUTHOR OF 'FLORA ADAIR'
ETC.

'Good shepherd, tell this youth what 't is to love'

Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, v. 2

Vol. I.

Henry S. King & Co.
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1873

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TO MAY

To one who long has borne with sadden'd brow
The weary cross of illness, oft in pain,
Who else had been my sister-leader now
Through story's fair and fancy-lit domain,
In loving homage do I dedicate
This simple tale, that I perchance may wing
The flight of suffering hours, that drag their weight
More slowly while we languish for the spring

POPPY

'WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE.'

CHAPTER I.

. . . Spirits are not finely touched
But to fine issues.—SHAKESPEARE.

'ALFRED, I have already told you that I cannot consent to your riding Mercury to-morrow,' said Mrs. Meredith to her son, who stood looking out of the window watching the ruddy tints of a wintry sun as it disappeared behind the distant hills. 'You are neither old enough, nor strong enough, to manage such a horse.'

'I am not a child, mother,' exclaimed the youth with a flush upon his cheek. 'And I

really *must* ride Mercury to-morrow. It is Lord Waters' only spare mount, and how good of him so to have favoured me! You know how proud he is of that horse.'

'Good? I think it was very inconsiderate of him to offer such a horse to a boy like you, and I will not permit you to ride him.'

'I am sorry to vex you, mother, but you know that I am a good horseman, whatever my age may be; and I have already accepted Lord Waters' offer, therefore I must go.'

'Then you will defy my authority, for I desire you not to go. I have no doubt you can ride that horse very well on the roads, but after hounds! . . . Even Fitz-gibbon can hardly master him, and he rides perfectly.'

The flush on Alfred's face deepened.

Mrs. Meredith's injudicious appeal to authority, and the assumed superiority of another's horsemanship had determined him more resolutely to join the hunt.

'I do not believe that anyone has a right to command another to act like a coward, and I cannot obey you in this,' he said hastily, and calling a favourite dog he went out into the grounds. . . .

Mrs. Meredith was the widow of a Captain Meredith, who had died some years after their marriage, leaving her with an only son and a slender income. Her husband's elder brother possessed a large estate in England, but, save a formal letter in answer to the announcement of her bereavement, no communication passed between them. Lord Waters—a distant relative of her own—had, however, offered her as a residence a pretty

cottage on his estate, which she gratefully accepted; hoping thus to save enough during her son's minority to enable him to enter the army without being solely dependent upon his pay.

When the boy was about twelve years old, Mr. Meredith wrote to Lord Waters proposing to send him to Eton, and afterwards to Cambridge at his own cost.

'It would break my heart to be separated from him,' Mrs. Meredith said, when Lord Waters showed her the letter; 'and you observe that his uncle never refers to *me*, he does not offer to enable me to live near Eton. It would seem that he wishes to separate us, but my son shall not accept anything from one who still cherishes resentment against his parents. So many years gone by, and an only brother's death, would

have purchased almost anyone's forgiveness: yet William Meredith has been relentless. There was a time however, when I could not have believed that he was hard and unforgiving!'

'But you have only once asked him to forgive, Mary?' objected Lord Waters.

'Because I never can forget his look and voice at that time, when he told me never to let him see me or hear of me again. He must remember *that* command, and he ought to know me too well to expect me to infringe it, when I might appear to be acting from interest. Even on my Alfred's death I merely wrote to announce our loss; yet I longed for one word of cordial affection and forgiveness at least for the dead. Had he but done this, how earnestly I would have sued for pardon, and told him how dear he

had been to me ever since my marriage, for his brother's sake, and above all, because I had been an occasion of suffering to him. But his answer showed no sign of relenting, and it added, if possible, to my bitter sorrow. . . . Please, dear friend, to write that I thank him very much, but that I cannot part from my boy.'

'Yet you must send him to school soon in any case,' protested Lord Waters; 'would not the alleged reason of your present refusal seem therefore as a pretext to Mr. Meredith?'

'Indeed it is not a pretext, Lord Waters, and I can never, never, send Alfred to school. You would not ask me to deprive myself of the one joy and comfort of my life? The rector will undertake his education, and you

know Dr. Denham is clever. Will not this plan answer?'

'Dr. Denham, no doubt, is quite able to make a learned man of any young fellow inclined to be a book-worm, but I fear Master Alfred would require a tighter hand than the good doctor's—' answered Lord Waters, who felt that his firmness was yielding before the wistful eyes which pleaded for a word of sanction from him. 'It may do very well, yet I must be candid and say that I think school would be much better for him. We all spoil him here, I, as much as anyone.'

'We will not spoil him any more. I will ask Dr. Denham to be a very Draco to him, and I will myself be, oh, *so* severe!'

His Lordship smiled at the notion of her

severity, but he had not the heart further to urge the point, and he wrote, as she desired, to Mr. Meredith. Meanwhile Alfred led a very pleasant life, indulged by his mother and the good old Rector, sharing the amusements of the Castle children, Dick and his sister Maud, and riding their father's horses. He loved his mother most dearly, notwithstanding the scene which the reader has already witnessed between them, but her alternate indulgence and exactions began to try him a little, now that he was no longer a child.

He came down to breakfast next morning dressed for the hunt and tried to chat as usual, but Mrs. Meredith was silent and thoughtful, yet without any appearance of displeasure.

'Good-bye, mother,' he said, standing up

as the clock struck nine, 'and do not be angry with me!'

Mrs. Meredith looked up, and Alfred saw that her eyes were very red.

'Mother, what is the matter? You have been crying!'

'I could not help it, I have felt so strangely nervous for some days, and the thought that an accident might happen to you from that wicked horse has haunted me all night.'

'Why did you not tell me this before? Why did you not *ask* me yesterday to stay at home for your sake? I will send at once to say I cannot go.'

'No, it is too late. You sent last night to desire the horse to be ready and to change now would look as if you really feel timid when the time has come for starting. I

know you ride very well, dear child, and I dare say it will be all right. I am foolishly nervous about you!'

Alfred hesitated, but a second glance at his mother's pale and anxious face decided him.

'If they choose to attribute it to fear let them!' At the same moment the blood started from his under lip, so strongly had he pressed his teeth upon it as he spoke.

He went to his own room and began a note to Lord Waters, but he could find no words of excuse to satisfy himself. To write that he yielded to his mother's fears seemed to him almost to imply that he admitted their justice . . . . He had written two notes and torn them up, when he found that he had already wasted too much time, and with a burning face he pushed away the paper and seized his hat.

As long as his mother had seemed to exact submission from him he would not sacrifice his own will to hers, but when with trembling lips she told him to go, and sought to make light of her own suffering, his generosity was roused and he resolved to spare her any further pain, yet he shrank from the mortification of refusing at the eleventh hour. Lord Waters, himself, who was a gay-hearted old gentleman and a keen sportsman, often seemed prouder of his handsome young kinsman—who would flirt with the prettiest girls, ride the most spirited horses, and lead all the mischief afoot—than of his more learned son, who was wont to converse about the old Latin authors with Father O'Connor, and on politics with the county member. With the peasantry, who are always great admirers of youthful daring

and courage, Alfred was also an especial favourite.

But now he walked hurriedly through the park without noticing any of the workmen whom he met, and for whom he had generally a kind word and a bright smile; he knew that he was going to disappoint them, to appear less courageous than they believed him to be; and he felt half ashamed to speak to them, they would be sure to wish him good sport and imply a compliment to his horsemanship!

Lord Waters was standing on the doorsteps surrounded by three or four gentlemen in hunting costume; their horses held by liveried grooms were impatiently pawing the ground; and under the portico were Lady Waters, Maud, her governess, and some other ladies.

'We were expecting you, my boy,' exclaimed his lordship, as Alfred approached him. 'I have been telling these gentlemen that they haven't a chance against you and Mercury, and that you are one of the very few youngsters to whom I would trust him. If I had not grown too heavy I can tell you that you would have no chance of such a mount to-day. It is no joke to ride him after hounds, but you are equal to the work: so pay your compliments to the ladies and let us be off.'

'I must not go with you, Lord Waters,' said the boy, trying to speak steadily, and casting a wistful look at Mercury. 'My mother—'

'She is not ill, I hope?' asked Lord Waters kindly, struck by Alfred's evident vexation.

'No,' he replied, too proud to shelter himself under an excuse which he did not believe to be true; 'but she had worked herself into such a state of nervous anxiety at the thought of my riding Mercury, and seemed so unhappy when I was about to start, that I promised not to go out to-day.'

'Well, "prudence is the better part of valour," and no doubt you have done well to yield to your mother's wishes,' answered Lord Waters, irritated towards Alfred by his seeming to justify the barely concealed smiles of his two London friends, to whom he had vaunted the boy's courage and skill. 'Yet you are not always so submissive. . . . Well, we must leave the ladies to take care of you, Alfred, since poor Mercury is considered to be too much for you!'

The smiles of the strangers and the in-

flexion of Lord Waters' voice were more than Alfred could bear, and he was on the point of recalling the groom who was leading Mercury back to the stables, when Maud, who saw the movement, laid her hand on her father's arm with the air of a privileged child to whom everything is permitted, and said:

'Papa, I do not think men brave!'

'My dear Maud, what do you mean?' replied Lord Waters, looking with amused surprise at his favourite child, whilst Alfred's face became crimson.

'I mean what I say, papa; there is Alfred, he *is* afraid to appear wanting in courage by remaining at home: and he is *not* at all afraid to ride Mercury, and so he will go with you. He had not courage to maintain his intention of doing what he really feared, nor had you for him. I think

you are all like that, and you call it being brave!'

'Pert pussy!' laughed her father. 'But you have not made out a bad case against us this time; still I do not see that Alfred is preparing to mount. And now we really must be off.'

'She is such a clever child!' observed Lady Waters' neighbour in an under-tone; and as the gentlemen rode away her ladyship turned back into the hall with a pleasant smile, leaving Maud still standing on the doorsteps.

Maud was only fourteen years of age, some four years younger than Alfred, whom she liked to patronise and torment by turns. She promised to be tall and remarkably handsome; her eyes were large and of a greenish-grey, which looked black at night;

her clear olive complexion contrasted well with her red lips, her dark eyebrows and lashes; and her black hair, fastened high in one thick plait, seemed to form as it were a coronet upon her small and graceful head. She was the last of three daughters, her two elder sisters having died when quite young; and in the absence of her brother at college, she ruled at home with undivided sway. Her father was too fond ever to thwart her, and her mother too proud of her to subject her to any strict schoolroom discipline: the consequence was that Maud was already becoming quite a young lady, being always, save during the fixed hours for study, more or less in society, and never dreaming of obeying anyone but her governess, who, although a person of talent and principle, was unfortunately of a proud and hard disposition.

'Well, Alfred, was I not right just now?' asked the imperious little beauty, approaching him with gracious mien. 'Have I not saved you from breaking a resolution? Why do you not thank me?'

'Nay, you have been already rewarded,' answered Alfred; 'Mrs. Burgoyne had an opportunity of observing that you were "such a clever child." To have recalled my strength of resolution you need only to have whispered, "But the promise to your mother!"'

'Who is bitter now?' cried Maud; the sparkle of her eye told, however, that she was pleased to hear Mrs. Burgoyne's compliment repeated. 'But I'll forgive you, as I know your heart's gone with the hunters, and you may come with me for a little walk to the stables. I want to look at my new pony.

Oh! a bright thought! We will have him saddled, and you can take me for a gallop in the fields and teach me to jump.'

'No Maud, not to-day, please: as I cannot hunt I had better go home to my studies. I really must not lose my morning's work any more without cause.'

Maud knit her brows for a moment, then with a sudden change of manner and a softened voice she said: 'For this once only Alfred; as I have a holiday do spend the morning here, or it will be so dull for me alone with mamma and her friends. Do be kind, dear Alfred, stay with me and give Mercury a little exercise to compensate for his loss of the hunt.'

'Oh, you wicked little fairy! you make me idle in spite of myself. You know there is no resisting when you begin to plead,' and

Alfred allowed her to lead him towards the stable. 'Why do women ever seek to exchange their almost irresistible power of persuasion for the exaction which we so easily set aside?'

He spoke thus, thinking more of his mother than of his companion.

'Because it is not always pleasant to ask, and have we not a right to expect you to please us?' answered Maud quickly.

The cold air had brought colour to her face, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure at having subjected another to her will and obtained the desired treat of a ride in the fields. As Alfred, struck with the contrast between the question and the childish voice, looked at her attentively, he forgot to answer, but murmured in his own mind: 'How beautiful she will be!'

CHAPTER II.

Hands of invisible spirits touch the strings
Of that mysterious instrument, the soul,
And play the prelude to our fate.—LONGFELLOW.

'PLEASE to come round by my mother's,' said Alfred, as he and Maud rode out of the yard. 'I wish to set her mind at rest about me, and my absence might cause her fresh uneasiness.'

'Why what has come to you to-day, Alfred?' asked Maud. 'As papa said, you are not always so submissive; tell me why you changed your mind this morning? When you sent word yesterday morning, had you not told your mother that you were to ride Mercury?'

'Yes, and I certainly deserve no credit for submission; when she *desired* me not to ride him, I said I did not think anyone had a right to command another to act like a coward, and I told her that I was going to order the horse to be ready for me.'

'How was it then? Did your mother insist upon your remaining at home this morning?'

'Would that she had insisted! for then I should have been out to day.'

'Oh, you naughty boy! But what *did* make you give it up?'

'I'll tell you how it all happened,' said Alfred impetuously. In those days he was more free with Maud than anyone else from that sensitive shyness which caused him to be so silent about the motives of his own actions, perhaps it was because, in years at

least, she was but a child. 'My mother irritated me by declaring that I was not able to ride Mercury to hounds—whereas men who understood these things, and your father especially, considered that I could manage the horse perfectly—and by trying to use her authority to prevent me from riding. This morning, however, I saw that she had been crying, and she acknowledged that she was haunted by the fear of an accident happening to me. I then offered to remain at home, but she told me to go, and said that her nervousness about me was foolish, that she knew I rode very well, and that to draw back at the last moment might really appear as if I were afraid. Of course it would do so, and I hated the thought of it, but the expression of her face was like a revelation of the greatness of her affection, since anxiety about me

could so alter it in one night, and I could not be so ungenerous as to give her any more pain. That look seems to pursue me, and although I cannot help regretting the loss of the day's sport, I am anxious to assure her that she has no cause for alarm.'

'I think you are inconsistent, Alfred!' replied little Maud. 'If you considered your mamma's fears unreasonable yesterday, they were the same to-day, and you must have always known that they were caused by anxiety about you, so that you changed your resolution without any stronger motive than you had before.'

'Don't reason so coldly, child. Do you not see the difference between submitting to an unreasonable command, and giving up a pleasure voluntarily on seeing that it could be enjoyed only at the cost of real suffering to another? Let us ride on quickly.'

Alfred was in a restless mood. There are few persons—and especially in youth—strong enough to feel that 'virtue is its own reward.' The first experience of a victory gained over ourselves seems often more full of bitterness and regret than of sweetness and satisfaction; and indeed, for real sacrifices, the reward of being able to rejoice in our victory is rarely perhaps granted until the close of life. In Alfred's case the sacrifice was truly not a very great one; yet, instead of feeling any inward satisfaction with himself, he was only conscious of a burning desire to ride Mercury before Lord Waters' supercilious friends, and was almost irritated against the over-anxious affection which had caused his mortification. But *his* reward was at hand, a reward which would shine like a ray of light through his life's first heavy cloud.

CHAPTER III.

When we were children we were loved more than we loved; and, having grown old, we also love more than we are loved. We must not complain. It is the honour of man to find again in his children the ingratitude which he showed to his fathers, and thus to end, like God, by a disinterested sentiment.—LACORDAIRE.

As Mrs. Meredith sat alone in the morning room after Alfred had gone out, the consciousness began to dawn upon her that she was not capable of guiding him, and that she could no longer keep him constantly at her side. She had loved him with all the strength of her nature, but she had loved him for herself, for the delights of having him always with her to pet and lead, as she had done when he was a child; and now that the

time had come when she could no longer suffice to him, it seemed to her as if the object of her life was gone. No sacrifice made for him would appear to her too great so that she could but retain an exclusive right to his affection and submission; but to abdicate that without a struggle, and to be content to promote his enjoyment and eventually his happiness in a world outside of her own affection, required a higher love than hers, great as she had proved it to be by her widowed life of fourteen years, spent in retirement in order to increase the small provision for her darling boy.

Alfred had said that his mother's expression on that morning had been like a revelation to him, and his conduct had been equally so to her. It had shown her that he was determined not to submit to authority

when the command seemed exacting or capricious; yet, an anxious look had conquered him in a moment. Mrs. Meredith failed, however, to understand thereby that her influence over her son might be, if she so willed it, far greater through the generosity of his awakening manhood, than it had ever been in his childhood through authority, and she yielded fully to the feeling of depression which had taken possession of her since the previous evening.

'Would it not be well if I were to die now?' she murmured, gazing wearily at the bright fire before her. 'It is time that Alfred should prepare to enter the army, and I could never bear the separation; besides, if I were dead, he would be so much more independent. Thank heaven I have been able to save enough to make our little for-

tune sufficient to purchase a commission for him, and give him besides, a small income. He would have it all for his own use if I were gone, and the few hundreds which Lord Waters has of mine would start him well. My noble, handsome boy! Would that I could always be near him, always be his first and best friend! But since that cannot be I would rather die now than live to see him even partly estranged from me . . . He would grieve sadly at first, I know, but he would become joyous again; and for me, it would be almost happiness to leave him while his heart is still all my own, and to know that by my death he will be spared many privations which would otherwise beset the opening of his career in the world!'

With melancholy pleasure did Mrs. Meredith then dwell upon the thoughts of her own

death, laying out in her mind all the details —her letter to her brother-in-law, Mr. Meredith of Chiltern Park, her last words to Lord Waters, and finally her parting from Alfred; at which point she became so affected as to be unable further to contemplate the gloomy picture.

Just then a servant entered the room with the post-bag, and, in order to conceal her emotion, Mrs. Meredith feigned to be busily occupied in searching among the folds of her dress for the little chain to which her small keys were suspended.

The maid had not gone many steps down the passage before she was startled by a low cry, and hastily returning to the room she found her mistress with her head thrown back against the chair and apparently unconscious.

Jane was a confidential servant, who had lived with Mrs. Meredith ever since her marriage; fearing to excite curiosity among the other servants by calling for aid, she carried her mistress to a sofa near the window, and was so employed in endeavouring to restore her to consciousness, that she did not hear the trotting of horses in the avenue.

'Come in Maud,' said Alfred, giving his horse's reins to a workman who was engaged near the house. 'My mother is always glad to see you, and we shall only stay a moment.'

The door of the morning room was only half shut, and he pushed it open without knocking, but the sight of his mother stretched on the sofa caused him to start back, releasing the hand of his companion whom he had been gaily leading. For an instant he remained motionless, as if op-

pressed by some nameless terror, and then he heard the low muttered words:

'I am dying, Jane! . . . My child! . . . Shall I never see him more? . . . Is he gone to the hunt?'

'Oh, thank God, no!' cried Alfred, glancing at Maud with a look of gratitude that, child as she was, thrilled to her heart. 'But you must not frighten one so, mother, you are not seriously ill?'

Mrs. Meredith opened her eyes at the sound of that dear voice, and, grasping his hands, she exclaimed:

'Ruined, ruined through me! But I cannot, will not die now, whilst I live you would at least have a home . . . Save me, Alfred, save me from death!'

Alfred clasped her in his arms, but her pallor terrified him, and he looked round for

help; the servant had gone for some remedies, but he saw Maud still standing near the door where he had left her. She had been completely overcome by the expression of Alfred's face when he had seemed to thank her for having kept him at home, and she was no longer the self-conscious little beauty, but a thoughtful, unselfish girl.

'Do you need anything, Alfred? What can I do for you?' she asked, coming closer to him.

'The doctor . . . Oh Maud, quickly, quickly!'

'Yes,' she answered simply, and darted out of the room; the next moment Alfred heard the sound of horses galloping at full speed along the avenue, and was satisfied that a messenger had been despatched for

medical aid. At the same moment the maid returned, and all their thought and care were devoted to Mrs. Meredith, who had fainted again.

'Leave her to me, sir, you only make her worse,' said the servant, as her mistress showed signs of returning animation, and her hands trembled as Alfred's hot tears fell upon them.

He stood up and went to the arm chair where his mother had been sitting when the post-bag was brought to her. Mrs. Meredith had said truly that his heart was still her own—the thought of her danger overwhelmed him. All the vexations that her very affection had so often caused him were forgotten; he could remember only its untiring tenderness, and then for the first time he thought of the words she had

uttered since his return, they referred to him: 'Ruined, ruined through me!'

'What did they mean? Had she received any bad news?' He looked at the post-bag lying on the table beside him, and close to it he saw an open letter; it was the announcement that Burgess & Co. had failed. His mother had often told him that his little fortune was placed in their hands, so that this letter explained the meaning of her unconnected words.

'And to think that such a trifle may rob me of her! . . . O God do not let it become indeed a misfortune for me!' he thought with all youth's true and generous contempt for the loss of money in comparison to that of a loved one . . . By degrees he grew calmer, persuading himself that there was no real danger, that his mother had only re-

ceived a severe shock. After a little time Jane's voice roused him from these quieting thoughts.

'If the doctor were only here, sir!' she said, more frightened than ever at the stupor into which Mrs. Meredith had fallen. 'I'm afraid the mistress is sinking, and I don't know what to do; but it's a good distance to his place, and we can't expect him for half an hour, or more.'

'Mother! mother!' whispered Alfred, standing up and hastening to her side. 'Speak to me, tell me that you are not going to leave me!'

Her lips moved, and as he tried to catch the feeble sounds, Jane exclaimed—

'God be praised! Here is the doctor!... Oh, but Lady Maud is the fine young lady, she went for him herself, and must have

led the other horse along with her, and haven't they come back in no time!'

Alfred turned his head to look out of the window, and saw the doctor handing Mercury's reins to a servant who already held Maud's pony, and at the same time he heard a quick, light step running up the stairs.

'Thank you, Maud!' was all he said, but the light which shone in his eyes as he looked at her, made her turn away with an indefinable feeling of happiness, although tears started to her eyes.

Jane took her down to the drawing-room where Alfred begged her to wait for him, but after some minutes the doctor came to her and said she must allow him to take her home as Alfred could not leave his mother.

'Is there danger, then?' she asked eagerly.

'More than danger, I fear there is certainty of the very worst!' replied the doctor. Mrs. Meredith's passionate appeals to him to save her life for her child's sake, and Alfred's silent grief, had affected him more than he liked to acknowledge, and agitation always made him abrupt in his outward manner.

'She wished to see your father,' he added, suddenly; 'but as he is absent, I said, I would see you home and return with Lady Waters.'

'Let me stay,' pleaded Maud, gently, subdued by the thought of her young friend's sorrow. 'I should like to remain, at least, until mamma comes.'

But the doctor was one of the few who did not yield to her little ladyship's fancies, and treated her according to her age.

'No!' he answered impatiently. 'You would be quite useless here, and probably

would only get frightened and make a fuss. . . Come, Lady Maud, we have no time to lose!'

'I was not useless or frightened when I went for you,' she said with an unsteady voice, as she followed him with her small head proudly erect.

When Lady Waters arrived Mrs. Meredith had become calmer, and had even been able to pencil a few lines to her brother-in-law. After having confided all her last wishes she fell into a state of despairing exhaustion, unable to conquer the agony of feeling that her life had been wasted, that all her care and self-denial in order to enrich her boy had been in vain.

'For years I have known that my heart was affected,' whispered Mrs. Meredith at length, 'and that my life might at any time terminate suddenly, but I did not fear to die, latterly,

because I believed that my boy's position would be at least, independent; now it is awful to think that I must leave him alone and almost destitute. Lady Waters, you and your husband have always been kind, most kind, and you will be real friends to my Alfred. May a dying mother's blessing be upon you and your children! But' . . . she breathed heavily, and a sudden change came over her face, Lady Waters hastily signed to Alfred and the Rector, who were in the adjoining room, to come to her; 'but if any sorrow should come to him that you or yours could prevent . . .'

A spasm seemed to catch her breath, and she started into an upright position. Alfred caught her in his arms, and her head fell heavily forward . . . he sank upon his knees beside the bed.

CHAPTER IV.

Farewell hours that late did measure
Sunshine days of joy and pleasure;
Hail thou gloomy night of sorrow,
Cheerless night that knows no morrow.—BURNS.

THE shock of his mother's sudden death seemed to have completely overpowered Alfred; his grief was very silent, and save to insist upon watching beside her remains until they were removed to the grave, he interfered with none of the arrangements made by his friends. It was only when, on returning from the churchyard, the mourning coach drew up to the door of Maurpton Castle, that his unnatural composure threatened to give way; and, as Lord Waters took his arm and

would have led him up the steps, he drew back.

'Good-bye,' he faltered, pressing his kind old friend's hand tightly . . . 'I cannot thank you now, I will go home.'

'No, indeed, my boy,' answered his Lordship; 'I cannot allow you to go back to the cottage, it is too lonely, we will visit it together some day, for the present you will stay with us.'

'True! . . . I had forgotten that I have no longer even a home!' He turned away hastily, and hurried down a walk leading to a part of the grounds called the wilderness.

Respect for the first outburst of grief, and diffidence in his own powers as a consoler, kept Lord Waters from following him, yet he did not like the thought of Alfred's wan-

dering about in the woods in such cold damp weather, and he went into the house in real trouble about the boy. In the hall he met his wife and told her his difficulty.

'Let me go to him,' said Maud, who was following Lady Waters and heard what her father had said; 'I am sure I shall be able to find him and make him come back.'

'Yes,' added her mother, 'let her go, he will care less that his sorrow should be witnessed by a child, like Maud, than by one of us.'

Her little ladyship liked to feel her power over others, and she had meant to show it on this occasion by inducing Alfred to return with her; but the idea that he would simply tolerate her companionship because she was a child quite offended her dignity, and she was on the point of making some excuse

for not accepting the granted permission, when a glance at her father's face banished every other thought save that of Alfred's trouble.

After a rapid chase through the shrubbery, Maud found the wanderer seated upon the trunk of a large tree, with his head resting upon his hands. The trembling of his bent form showed that the violence of that first paroxysm had not yet passed; nevertheless Maud went up to him unhesitatingly.

'Alfred!' she said, touching him lightly with her hand.

He started, and seemed to shrink from her touch, but remained silent.

'But Alfred,' she persisted, 'I have come for you and will not go back without you; look, the rain has begun, and I know you will not keep me out in it.'

'No, I do not want you. . . . Go home. I have no home'

'Yes, you have ours, and I have told you I will not go without you; so if you make me remain shivering in the cold and rain, and I get an illness afterwards, you will be the cause of it.'

'No, not I but your own self-will. It was cruel not to leave me alone, even here, and now you say you will not return without me because you always want to show that your influence cannot be resisted.'

'And what was my motive when I galloped for the doctor, and led a horse like Mercury rather than there should be any delay?' she answered, with a strange mixture of childishness and wounded pride.

'Oh Maud, forgive me! . . . I can never forget it. Forgive me!'

For a few minutes Maud stood with her hands in his, and then she gently drew him towards her, in order to make him stand up: he no longer resisted, and suffered her to lead him towards the castle.

CHAPTER V.

What looks to thy dim eyes a stain
In God's pure light may only be
A scar, brought from some well-won field
Where thou would'st only faint and yield.

MISS PROCTOR.

LORD WATERS was only a distant connection of the late Mrs. Meredith, but he had been sincerely attached to her brother and had promised him on his death-bed to be a friend to her should she ever need one. Most kindly did Lord Waters fulfil that promise when she became a widow, yet the good-natured weakness which had induced him to sanction, at least tacitly, her refusal to accept her brother-in-law's offer to send Alfred to Eton, proved a real misfortune for the boy.

After the day of the funeral Alfred succeeded in restraining his grief before others, but his silent depression only seemed to increase. Deprived of fortune, a stranger to his father's family, and without those habits of application which would have enabled him to embrace a lucrative profession, he felt as if he had become a burden to his friends. The passionate yearning for the lost affection which had been his by right became almost unbearable, and the very kindness of the Waters' weighed upon him. His poor mother had not been more than a week in the grave, when he resolved to tell Lord Waters firmly, yet gratefully, that he could no longer remain an idle trespasser upon his bounty.

In answer to the announcement of his sister-in-law's death, and the unfortunate

cause of it, Mr. Meredith had written to invite his nephew to Chiltern Park, and proposed to send him to Cambridge to finish his education. This letter Lord Waters had received some days before, but had delayed showing it to Alfred for two reasons. First, because he fancied that to speak to him so soon about a change of residence might appear as if he wanted to get rid of him; and secondly, because the invitation and the offer to finish his education seemed prompted less by any tender feeling towards the doubly-tried boy, than by a sense of pride that his nephew should not be dependent upon distant connections of Mrs. Meredith's; and the kind old nobleman shrank from wounding his young friend, whilst at the same time he believed it would be his duty to induce Alfred to accept his uncle's protection, however

ungraciously it might appear to have been offered.

'Now Alfred, I am not going to listen to any nonsense about your being a "trespasser" upon us,' interrupted his lordship when Alfred entered his study one morning, and timidly began his speech. 'You know, or you are a duller young fellow than I take you to be, that as long as I am master here you will be more than welcome, but there are others who have a claim to direct your future which I have not. I waited for you to recover yourself a little before calling your attention to your own position, but as you have spoken of it I feel I must show you this letter from your uncle. . . . There boy, sit down and read it, whilst I look over some of these papers which the steward has just brought me.'

'My Lord,—In reply to your communica-

tion of Mrs. Alfred Meredith's death and the loss of her son's small provision, I beg to thank you for your attention to my nephew, and to relieve you of any responsibility on his account. I am willing to receive him at Chiltern Park, and to send him to Cambridge in order to fit him for the profession he may choose to follow. He will thus have the means of finishing his education, which has probably been neglected, through the same weakness which caused my offer to send him to Eton some years ago to be rejected. Upon the satisfaction he may give me will naturally depend my future conduct towards him.

'I have the honour to remain, My Lord, Your Lordship's obliged,

'WILLIAM MEREDITH."

Although Lord Waters appeared to be

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occupied in examining the papers before him, his thoughts were anxiously fixed upon Alfred. Mr. Meredith's was a hard letter to place before him, yet his lordship thought it better to do this than to attempt to tell him its contents in a softened form. A rustling sound soon caused him to look up, and he saw the paper flung, all crushed and torn, into the fire.

'What have you done, Alfred?' he exclaimed sternly; 'that letter was addressed to me.'

The rebuke had the desired effect: it arrested Alfred's anger, and made him ashamed of having so far forgotten himself.

'I beg your pardon, Lord Waters,' he said after a short pause, 'it was very wrong to destroy a letter directed to you, but I forgot for the moment that the magnanimous offer

had not been made directly to me, and I treated it in the only manner it deserved. How dares Uncle Meredith so censure my dearest mother, whom he neglected during life, and who deprived herself in order that I should never be dependent upon him. I have never been able to understand why he was so displeased at his brother's marriage. Was not your cousin their equal, at least in position? And although my mother would never let me blame him for his neglect of her, he must be worse than a miser if he could cherish resentment against her simply because she was portionless. I would rather starve than accept anything from so poor-hearted a man!'

'Gently, gently, my boy; your uncle's is, at least, no sordid nature. Love of money has not made him the harsh, cold man he

seems to have become; it was disappointed affection; and the disappointment has sunk very deep, for, as you know, he has remained single. He has been soured, and you must not be hard towards him; and although the form of his invitation is apparently cold, you must not refuse it.'

'Not refuse it? . . . Not be hard towards him? . . . Oh, it is too much to ask! Did a disappointment about the woman he loved give him a right to dislike his brother's wife, and reflect harshly upon her even after her death?'

'Yes almost, if they were one and the same person.'

Alfred gazed at Lord Waters as if he did not understand him.

'Sit down again, Alfred, and try to listen to me quietly for a few moments. It is

necessary, I see, that you should know something of your parents' history, in order that you may do your uncle justice. Had you been less violent against him I would willingly have been silent: but you have forced me to speak. Your uncle was the elder son, although not nearly so well-looking and pleasing as his brother. During that brother's absence with his regiment in Ireland, he met your mother in London, and fell in love with her. It was her first season; she was very pretty, and very fond of amusement, and she accepted William Meredith in compliance with her mother's wishes. Not yet knowing what it was really to love she felt no objection to become the wife of one who was evidently devoted to her, and who had so many worldly advantages to recommend him. She returned to

this neighbourhood, and for the first time met her brother-in-law elect, whose regiment was quartered here. Need I tell the rest? Their position naturally caused them to become intimate; they walked, rode, danced together, believing that they only enjoyed each other's society as brother and sister, but at the end of a few weeks when William joined them, they found out the real state of their feelings. It is not for me to say whether Mary was culpably weak or not, but she was certainly very true; and she told William Meredith all that had happened, but said also that she was ready to fulfil her engagement with him if he wished it, and that Alfred would take some foreign service. William Meredith left the house at once, having told her to be happy with whom she liked, but to see or address him no more.

Only at the time of her death did she break that command; she gave my wife a few pencilled lines to send, asking him to forgive her in the person of her son. Do you not believe, Alfred, that if your parents could both speak to you now, they would tell you to accept your uncle's invitation, and try to repay him in some degree, by your affection, for all the pain they caused him?'

'Poor uncle!' . . . . . .

Lord Waters felt that the victory was gained, and had again recourse to his papers.

'Have you written to my uncle since you received that letter, Lord Waters?' asked Alfred, after a long silence.

'Yes, I told him I would make his offer known to you as soon as I thought you were able to think about your own prospects, and that he should hear from me again, but that

I hoped, in any case, he would approve of your remaining with us until after Christmas.'

'No, better let it be at once. . . . To leave you now will make the parting from her whom I shall never see again and from all among whom I have grown up—from my boyhood in short—like one great sorrow; but to go after some time would be to receive a second wound. . . . Please to tell Uncle Meredith that I shall be ready in a week.'

Alfred stood up and walked towards the fire. Lord Waters followed him.

'No, no Alfred,' he said, leaning one hand heavily upon his shoulder, 'you are too hasty in your conclusions. A few minutes ago you "would never accept" your uncle's invitation, and now you would be off at a moment's notice! Again I say, no. Christ-

mas among strangers, for the first time, would be too sad for you, and although your uncle is a good man he is stern and exacting, not foolishly fond, even in his old age, of the sports and habits of youth, and therefore not so indulgent as some of your Irish friends, Master Alfred. I would rather you did not leave me, my boy, before you have been able to prepare yourself a little for the change ; and it will be a change, believe me.'

Lord Waters' affectionate manner overcame Alfred, his self-control fairly gave way, yet after a few minutes, he said: 'It is because I know the change will be great that I feel I must go at once, or I should lose courage. . . . Remaining here with you but ill prepares me to live with my uncle, yet, after what you have told me, I think it would be ungenerous to refuse. Help me

Lord Waters, to do what is right, send the answer to day, and tell me when it is gone.'

As he finished speaking he hastily left the study, and shut himself up in his own room. The love for his mother to which Mr. Meredith had never been unfaithful, seemed to form a link between them, and Alfred longed, yet dreaded, to meet him ; so, in his desire to go as soon as possible there was, perhaps, mingled with the fear of growing too fond of the genial atmosphere of Maurpton Castle, some degree of curiosity and of the restlessness of sorrow.

Maud, strange to say, was less affected by the unexpected news of his intended departure than anyone else. She had been delighted at the prospect of his coming to them, yet disappointed when, even after the first few days, he never offered to play at

croquet, or take her out to ride. The rôle of consoler wearied her when the novelty had passed away, and she had already begun rather to resent his continued depression, yet Alfred observed it not, and hers was the last face upon which his dimmed eyes rested, as the carriage bore him away from her home, and in them shone the same look of silent gratitude as on the day of his mother's death, when she had appeared to him to be his good angel.

CHAPTER VI.

My heart is gone beyond the grave,
In search of love I cannot find.—L. E. L.

CHILTERN Park was situated in one of the southern counties of England. The cold was, however, very great that year, and when, after nearly a day's journey from London, Alfred got out at a small station overlooking the sea, he felt chilled and more utterly alone than he had done since the moment when he caught the last glimpse of Lord Waters standing on the pier, as the boat glided out of Kingstown harbour. A servant in mourning came up to him, asked if he were Mr. Alfred Meredith, and said that the carriage was waiting for him.

Trifles, at such moments, have a marvellous power of affecting us, and the servant's mourning livery touched Alfred deeply. It seemed to him a delicate tribute to his mother's memory, especially in a place where she had never been seen, where her very name was unknown, so that respect for the world's opinion could not have influenced it. Thus, during the drive to Chiltern Park his heart insensibly warmed towards his unknown relative, yet, when the carriage drew up before the house, his courage seemed to vanish.

A servant stood ready to receive him, and in a deferential manner begged him to follow. They crossed the large hall, with its polished oaken floor, and all looked grand and imposing, but when the drawing-room door was opened no friendly hand grasped Alfred's

and no cordial voice welcomed him, the room seemed empty.

'Is my uncle not at home?' he asked haughtily.

The servant retired without answering, as Mr. Meredith advanced from the embrasure of a window. The tones of that imperious voice had gone straight to the old man's heart, he had not heard anything like them for more than twenty years, yet there was no sign of emotion in his manner or words, save a slight huskiness of voice.

'How do you do, nephew,' he said, shaking hands with him. 'You have had a cold journey: will you come to the fire?'

'First let me thank you, uncle,' said Alfred in a low voice, and struggling to resist the chilling impression of such a greeting; 'not so much for having offered me a home,

as for the respect you have paid to my mother's memory;' and his eyes glanced from Mr. Meredith's mourning suit to that of the servant who had just entered with the lamp.

'My name, the name of Meredith, claimed that,' replied his uncle coldly, and seating himself in an arm-chair.

A mist gathered before Alfred's eyes, but pride enabled him to recover himself, and he gazed around the room with an assumed air of indifference.

'I should like to change my travelling dress, sir,' he said abruptly, after this awkward silence had lasted for a few minutes. He felt that he must be alone, that it was impossible to stand there any longer with his uncle's cold grey eyes fixed upon him.

Mr. Meredith rang the bell, and desired

the servant to show Mr. Alfred Meredith to his room ; then, turning to Alfred, he said :

'I dine at seven. It is now nearly half-past six, you can dress in half an hour, I suppose ?'

When Alfred left the room Mr. Meredith's stern countenance relaxed, and something very like tears glistened in the eyes which had seemed so cold to Alfred.

'How like them both !' he mused. 'How like *her* in his indifference to material good where his affections are concerned. He would not thank me for giving him a home, but was full of gratitude to me for putting my household into mourning for her. . . . *I* thanked for that ! . . . *I*, whose mourning for her has been life-long ! He has been taught, I suppose, to regard me as hard and unforgiving. Yet I have only been so because

no one had confidence enough in me to try to break through the outward crust. . . . Had my brother or Mary disobeyed me, had they come to me in their difficulties, they would have seen how fully I could forgive; but they took me at my word—a word spoken in a moment of bitter disappointment—and believed that I was not generous enough to pardon their involuntary fault, or to appreciate Mary's candour and disinterestedness in telling me that she did not know what love was when she engaged herself to me, and that my brother, with little more than an officer's pay, was dearer to her than I with all my fortune. . . . Their real wrong towards me was in believing me incapable of unselfish affection, and what they chose to think me I have almost become! . . . How the sight of their son affected me! . . . How I pitied

him! Yet he saw it not. He thanked me for an act of common respect to his mother, as if any sign of feeling were a marvel in me, and as usual I could not help seeming to confirm the idea formed of me. . . . I cannot put aside the mask . . . if he would only see through it!'

Could Alfred have known all this, how much less bitter would have been that first half hour spent alone in his room, when, having literally accepted his uncle's words, he believed himself merely tolerated, through the same pride of name which, as Mr. Meredith had implied, was the motive of his outward mourning for his sister-in-law. He was obliged to rouse himself, however, and go down to dinner, but the dishes were removed one after another almost untouched, and the meal passed silently, for neither

uncle nor nephew felt equal to the effort of conversing.

In the evening, as Mr. Meredith dozed in his chair by the fire, Alfred for the first time looked attentively at him. He was slight and delicate-looking, with small pointed features, and thin grey hair; the lines about his mouth betokened shyness and timidity rather than sternness, and as he leaned back with closed eyes, the expression of his face was that of one long accustomed to suffer. Alfred thought of his solitary life and of its cause, again he felt inclined to think that his uncle must be warm-hearted, and even sensitive. As Mr. Meredith slowly opened his eyes, and met that sad pitying gaze, he murmured, like one still half asleep: 'It was thus she looked at me the last time I ever saw her!'

Alfred stretched out his hand towards his uncle's, then hastily drew it back again, remembering that any unsought mark of affection on his part might seem prompted by interest. But for this thought the ice would probably have been broken between them then and for ever, but Alfred remained silent, and Mr. Meredith, as if startled by the sound of his own voice, stood up hastily and rang for tea. When he re-seated himself his face seemed to have resumed the cold and stiffened look which it had worn before.

'You will find Chiltern Park and the society of a dull old man a gloomy change from Maurpton Castle,' he said at length, as if he thought it necessary to say something about himself. 'I knew Lord Waters long ago, he was a gay sportsman then, I

hear that he is not much altered. We Englishmen, as a rule, have not the thoughtless gaiety which never seems to desert the Irish.'

'They can be gay with the gay and sad with the sad, they have received the gift of sympathising with others,' replied Alfred, thinking of the coldness of his present reception in contrast with the Waters' affectionate sympathy, and wounded by what he fancied was an unkind reflection upon them.

'I did not mean to censure the Irish. I know how winning and amiable they can be,' he said gently, liking Alfred the better for resenting even a fancied slight to those who had been so good to him, although hurt at his appearing to regard him as devoid of sympathy. 'And now I dare say you are

tired, and would like to go to bed. To-morrow I expect your cousin, Joseph Bertram, and his mother, to spend the Christmas vacation here; I begged them to come as early as they could this year, it will be less dull for you when you have a companion of your own age.'

'How kind of you to think of my pleasure!' exclaimed Alfred with a feeling of remorse for all his harsh judgment.

'Such a trifle would seem nothing to him if he had not been told that I was an unfeeling old bear!' thought Mr. Meredith, and he answered coldly: 'I considered it better that you should have as much time as possible to become intimate with your cousin before you go with him to Cambridge . . . . Good night!'

And thus they parted on the first evening

of their acquaintance, each misunderstanding the other, and yet attracted by the consciousness of mutual love for one whom they would never see again on earth!

CHAPTER VII.

Le monde se paye de paroles; peu approfondissent les choses.—PASCAL.

THE arrival of the Bertrams was a relief. Joseph was the senior only by a few months, but he looked at least a year or two older than Alfred. He bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Meredith, although, instead of grey, he had piercing dark brown eyes and a more commanding expression; there was evidently more of calculated reserve in his character than of the proud timidity and sensitiveness of his uncle. It was expected that he would be the heir to Chiltern Park, but as he had never been so recognised by its

master it was thought better that he should choose a profession, and he was then studying to become a physician.

His mother had married the younger brother of a baronet, fully expecting to become Lady Bertram, for although the elder brother had long been in the holy state of wedlock he was childless. Some years however after Miss Meredith's marriage, a son and heir was unexpectedly born to the baronetage in the direct line, and then she began to think she had made a mistake in her choice of a husband, especially as Mr. Bertram, also disappointed, became a more determined gambler than ever and often reduced his family to the very verge of distress. At last Mrs. Bertram obtained a legal separation, with the right to keep her son with her and to receive the interest of

her own fortune; all this, however, was a sad fall from her early expectations.

Joseph had thus grown up in an atmosphere of strife and disappointed ambition, where he had learnt to consider fortune and power as the most desirable things in life, and that no effort should be spared in order to obtain them. Alfred, on the contrary had only known affection and enjoyment, wherein the great object seemed to be to avoid everything disagreeable . . . .

'What do you intend to become, Alfred?' asked Joseph one day as they returned from a long walk.

They were rounding the brow of a hill, and before them, across an arm of the sea, was a sharp headland which the sun was tinging with a red glow, as of fire; contrasting vividly with the spotless white of the

country, for it was thickly covered with snow, to which a hard frost had given a bright glittering appearance. From the leafless branches of the trees bordering the winding lanes hung icicles in fantastic forms, and here and there a hardy evergreen peeped through as if to give an earnest that spring would come again. There was an absence of all animation, all the pleasant country sounds—the warbling of birds, the lowing of cattle, the hum of busy labour; and those sprigs of green and the ever-moving sea, seemed to triumph over the cold stillness of death. Impressed by the scene Alfred's thoughts had wandered far away, they were with his mother and the friends of his childhood, and that question: What do you intend to become? broke rudely in upon an indistinct vision of unending reunion.

'An officer, like my father,' he said, half impatiently. 'I always intended to be a soldier.'

'Yes, but now you have no longer an independence of your own, and you could not make your fortune in the army. You had better turn your thoughts to some profession.'

'And spend all my best days poring over books, or perhaps accounts, which I hate, or trying to master some science for which I have no taste! No, thank you! I can do without the fortune, but I will not plunge myself into difficulties which at best would be poorly repaid by tardy wealth. I mean to lead as pleasant a life as I can!'

'But what do you call a pleasant life?'

'Well, I suppose, as far as I can describe it, it would be to be always with those whom

one likes best, and to be free to follow one's favourite pursuits; if I can't have this I must make the best of what I can have, and, if a military career will not make me rich enough to enjoy such a home as I should like, it will at least spare me the drudgery of a distasteful occupation and the weariness of waiting for success which might never come. I hate waiting!'

'And I,' exclaimed Joseph, with a sudden kindling of his dark eyes, 'would wait for years, and encounter suffering and difficulty rather than relinquish a thing I desired. I would yield it to no one, and if it were taken from me I would make the possessor repay me by suffering. I would win back the coveted treasure or die! . . . "Money is power," say some; and "knowledge is power," say others: I am determined to have both!'

'All right! if you think they will make you happy,' replied Alfred, smiling; 'but money and power would be too dearly bought for me by a long struggle. I cling to the thought of my epaulets and a light heart, even with a light purse.'

'But perhaps you expect our uncle to make you rich,' said Joseph, struck by the notion that his cousin had a hope of winning Mr. Meredith's favour, and that he did not know how his mother had sinned against him. 'If so you must suppose him to be a marvellously good Christian and to return good for evil! Your mother jilted him —'

'How dare you, Joseph! If you ever repeat —'

'My dear fellow, do be a little more reasonable,' interrupted Joseph in his turn. 'Can you say that it is not true?'

Alfred's countenance grew still darker, but with an evident effort over himself he crossed his arms and walked on in silence.

'Well, you see,' added Joseph, 'I was merely just, and called a thing strictly by its name. I will be more cautious in future; indeed I did not intend to vex you, but to induce you to think a little more earnestly about your prospects. Uncle says I am to be your bear-leader at Cambridge, but if you will not be in earnest what good will my mentorship do?'

Alfred still remained silent thinking what an odious thing mere justice is . . . Surely his mother's only fault had been one of weakness—excusable in a girl of eighteen—in engaging herself before she knew her own heart: her after-conduct had been true and loyal, yet mere justice classed it with all that

is heartless and false in a woman! Joseph, he remembered, might not know the circumstances of the case, yet he felt that it would be impossible for him to relate the particulars to so indifferent a listener.

'What you said, Joseph, is not true in the real sense of the word,' Alfred said at last; 'but even if it were it was unpardonable in you to speak so to me . . . As for the rest, I do not expect my uncle to forget all that he has suffered, nor do I expect any fortune from him. I simply accepted his offer to finish my education in order not to wound him by an ungracious refusal . . . Now let us get back quickly, the pleasure of the walk is over for me.'

'Forgive me, Alfred, I am so sorry to have vexed you!'

Joseph held out his hand and a look of

softness came into his face, his regret was evidently real; and Alfred, too generous to reject any expression of sincere sorrow, gave him his hand in return. Those rare gleams of softness breaking through an habitually imperturbable and slightly cynical manner have a certain charm over all, and Alfred began to feel something of its influence in regard to his cousin.

Joseph had accepted Mrs. Bertram's version of her brother's undying resentment towards his sister-in-law and her son, and was therefore quite satisfied that, unless Alfred sought to ingratiate himself by flattery, or a show of affection, Mr. Meredith would never leave him any of the property, although he might give him a small sum in ready money. Joseph could like well and with all his natural tenacity, anyone who did

not interfere with his own plans; re-assured by Alfred's manner, and pleased with his hasty but open-hearted nature, he resolved thenceforth to take him into his friendship.

CHAPTER VIII.

I certainly never endeavoured to reach those heights by using the creeping powers of the reptile.—SIR HUMPHRY DAVY.

MRS. BERTRAM had heard with dismay of her nephew's presence at Chiltern Park, although she believed that Mr. Meredith had merely offered him a home from a feeling of family pride, and that he really disliked him as Mary O'Grady's son; yet she feared that, if the boy had tact enough, he might ingratiate himself with his uncle, to the prejudice of her son Joseph—for the old gentleman, as she knew, dearly loved the name of Meredith. The more she saw of Alfred, however, the less she feared that he would become the

favourite, it seemed to her that his impulsive manner and incautious way of speaking would serve but as good foils to Joseph's evenness of temperament and avoidance of whatever might jar with his uncle's habits and feelings.

Joseph was quite as anxious as Mrs. Bertram that he should be the heir to Chiltern Park, and therefore he was careful never to displease his uncle, but he was too proud to cringe or affect what he did not feel. Mr. Meredith, in return, felt respect for his elder nephew, but no affection; whereas his heart was almost irresistibly attracted towards Alfred, who, in his freedom from all calculation, resembled those who had been dearer than any others to Mr. Meredith and through whom he had suffered most: yet he could not lay aside his chilling manner and seek to win the affection he yearned for.

They would probably have understood one another had they been left alone together for any length of time, but Joseph's vacation was quickly drawing to a close, and it seemed to be an accepted arrangement that Alfred was to go with him to Cambridge. Mr. Meredith would have liked to keep him at Chiltern Park, and Alfred would have liked to stay, but neither would be the first to propose an alteration of the original plan.

'How I wish we could sometimes make another read one's thoughts!' said Alfred to himself one day, after he fancied he had detected his uncle looking at him with a strange expression of sadness. 'If I could only say, "Uncle I do not want any of your money, but for my mother's sake let us be friends, I know *she* would like me to try to

repay you in some degree for all the pain she caused you long ago. Do not send me far away from you." But if it be true that he is so resentful he would only misunderstand me and think me designing. And then the Bertrams! . . . Of course they would believe that I was only trying to curry favour. No! . . . Uncle must be the first to speak. If he would but ask me whether I wished to go to Cambridge!'

'Do you like Cambridge, Joseph?' asked Alfred on a Sunday afternoon, as they sat near the window with a small table between them on which there was lying an open atlas.

'Yes, there is life at Cambridge, something to contend for; you must fight hard, I can tell you, if you would obtain pre-eminence there, in science, or even in rowing!' answered

Joseph with a slight curl of his lip, as he uttered the last word.

'I fancy I should prefer the sort of fighting one would be likely to meet with *there*,' said Alfred, laying his hand upon the map.

'Well, it would be better to be distinguished as an officer than as a rower, that I confess; but almost anyone can be a good soldier, every one cannot be a senior wrangler!'

'Evidently neither of us has been convinced by this morning's sermon of the superior joy of a life passed in peace and obscurity,' said Alfred, smiling.

'No, we are not likely to be caught by such conventional chaff as that. What a bore it must be for a poor wretch of a curate to be obliged to get up a fine discourse which he does not believe, and can hardly expect

any *man* to accept! How often have I heard some of them declaim about forgiving and loving those who have injured us; yet they know that nobody forgives another who has really made him suffer!'

'Surely, if a person knows that the injury was unpremeditated, he could forgive it? Otherwise he would indeed be a poor-spirited fellow, and —'

Alfred had forgotten that his uncle and Mrs. Bertram were in the room, but Joseph's significant glance towards the fire-place, near which they were sitting, caused him to blush and break off in the middle of the sentence.

'My dear Alfred, you should be in less haste in your judgment of things that you do not understand. Had you ever been deeply injured you would not speak as you did just now,' said Mrs. Bertram, delighted at Alfred's

imprudence, as she fancied it would render him displeasing to his uncle.

She little knew that her brother's feeling was: 'What a fine frank fellow he is! . . . . Would that they had not so prejudiced him against me, for I could have loved him dearly; but his confusion when he remembered that I was present showed too plainly that he thought his censure applicable to me, and I cannot stoop to prove its injustice. I should like to keep him with me, but, thinking of me as he does, he must long to get away.'

Thus was Alfred's fate sealed, and a few days afterwards he left Chiltern Park with the Bertrams. On the morning of their departure Mr. Meredith told him he should receive the same allowance as his cousin Joseph, and asked him what profession he thought of studying for.

'I wish to enter the army, sir,' replied Alfred.

Now it happened that Mr. Meredith had a special dislike to the army; it was connected in his mind with the great disappointment of his life, and he fancied it rendered men vain and trifling.

'You will never enter the army with my consent,' he exclaimed hastily; 'an officer's life is idle and worthless.'

'Oh, sir, my—'

'Do not answer me now,' interrupted Mr. Meredith; 'when you return for the summer vacation you can tell me what profession you will adopt.'

'Indeed, sir, I can never change.'

'Then expect no assistance from me,' said Mr. Meredith, still much excited; 'but I do not want to hear any more about it now.

You will have time for reflection during the next six months, meanwhile I hope to hear good accounts of your application, and promise of future success.'

Joseph had promised to help his cousin as far as he could, and he was one of those who seldom forget a promise whether made to others or merely in his own mind. After they had been some little time at Cambridge he saw that Alfred was separating from his set, and supposed that he did so from a feeling of mortification at not being able to compete with those around him in mental acquirements. Joseph, however, determined to keep him with them if possible, as he saw that his backwardness was not owing to any deficiency of natural ability, but simply to his irregular course of study.

'Why Alfred, you are deserting us,'

Joseph said one day when he happened to be alone with his cousin, 'and getting among the wild fellows. Uncle will not be pleased, you know he wishes you to go in for honours.'

'Is it not enough that one of his nephews should take them? You can support the honour of the family among the learned here,' replied Alfred impatiently. 'I have no fancy to belong to a set of fellows who think themselves superior to everyone else because they can write verses in some dead language. As if that proved that they had any great genius!'

'But it proves no such thing. There are lots of these fellows who will never be remarkable after they have left the University. They have good memories and a wonderful capacity for imitation, and therefore they seem to excel in classics, but they have no origin-

ality. You could do far better if you were to set to work in earnest, and as you start at a disadvantage the glory of beating them would be all the greater.'

'Yes, but the race is not so easily won, and I would rather avoid the thorny hedges than force my way through them and perhaps not win after all.'

'You could win if you like!'

'Thanks for your faith in me. I do think I might win, but at the same time I am not going to run the risk of a defeat, and I know I can be pre-eminent among the rowers!'

The boast was not a vain one. Alfred was soon one of the chiefs of the gay set, celebrated as a rider, a rower, a cricketer—as everything, in short, save as an attentive student. His companions found, however, that there was one kind of mischief which he

steadily resisted—that of getting into debt; and at first there were rumours of 'd—d cautious!' 'shabby,' and such like. One evening, however, after a supper in a friend's rooms, he consented to play at écarté, the others gathered round the table, and by degrees the betting became high.

'By Jove, Meredith, that king will cost you some ponies;' said one of the bystanders, as the dealer turned up a king.

'Then I have lost as much as I can afford,' answered Alfred, standing up hastily.

'What! run away because chance seems against you!' exclaimed one of his backers. 'Oh, that will never do! What signifies such a trifle as you have lost? In any case your old Crœsus of an uncle could not refuse to pay debts of honour.

'I shall not play any more to-night,' answered Alfred resolutely.

'It is wonderful what some fellows will stoop to rather than lose a rich relation's favour!' muttered his opponent, standing up.

'I'll tell you what an honourable man would not stoop to,' cried Alfred, angrily, turning towards him—'to incur debts which he could not pay without the help of a rich relation, whose disapprobation he was determined to brave in his choice of a career! That is my position, and if I ever asked my uncle to pay for me I should consider myself as his debtor, pledged in honour not to oppose his wishes about my future. I will neither sell my freedom nor break a pledge, even to avoid the condemnation of my—*noble* adversary!'

This adversary's father having been raised to the peerage only a few years before, this sally was received with a general laugh, and Alfred's popularity lost nothing by the event

of that evening. Still, there rankled in his mind a secret mortification at having been sent to Cambridge, utterly unprepared as he was, to compete with his cousin, and in his own mind he resolved that his first term there should be his last.

When the vacation drew near, Lord Waters invited him to Ireland, but the sort of attraction of mingled respect and compassion that he felt for his uncle induced him to return first to Chiltern Park. Mr. Meredith was evidently pleased at this, and for some days after his arrival there seemed a probability that they would come to understand each other fully. Alfred's improved spirits gave greater freedom to his manner towards his uncle, and the old gentleman's outward coldness, and even bitterness, began to give way before the influence of a frank young heart.

It brought back to him the days of his youth, and he sometimes referred to them in his conversation; he even spoke of Ireland, of Lord Waters and others whom he had known there, and all this time he asked no disagreeable questions about his nephew's studies at Cambridge.

CHAPTER IX.

I would your spirit were easier for advice.—SHAKESPEARE.

JOSEPH had made arrangements for a walking tour with one of his university friends, and Mrs. Bertram could not leave London until he had started; she then hastened to Chiltern Park, not at all relishing the idea of Alfred's prolonged stay alone with her brother, although she did not seriously fear any rivalry on her nephew's part. It was impossible, she thought, that Mr. Meredith could ever compare him to Joseph, who was so successful at college, and so careful not to commit any youthful follies which might displease his uncle. She was, however, a little alarmed on

finding the uncle and nephew so much more intimate than at the time of her former visit.

In her reception of Alfred, there was an air of subdued compassion, and occasionally an inadvertent expression from her seemed to betray her fears that his conduct at Cambridge must have afflicted Mr. Meredith greatly. Alfred grew restless, and Mr. Meredith seemed to become again cynical and uncertain; Mrs. Bertram, however, was all sweetness, and it would have seemed ridiculous to accuse her of sowing discord, yet the harmony of the first few days after his return was gone.

The desire to see Maurpton Castle, with all its memories and his old friends, became irresistible, and he told Mr. Meredith that he had fixed to go in a few days. The informa-

tion was received coldly, but without displeasure, yet he afforded Alfred no encouragment to speak about his future plans.

On the evening before his departure, Mrs. Bertram chanced to see a review of an essay which Joseph had written in one of the scientific publications, and she read it to Mr. Meredith, with all a mother's natural pride in her son's success; mingled therewith, however, was a feeling of pleasure at being thus able to mark his superiority over his cousin Alfred.

Mr. Meredith, strange to say, was more vexed at the thought that his favourite nephew—for Alfred was indeed the favourite, although he acknowledged it only in the silence of his own heart—had gained no distinction, than pleased at Joseph's dawning fame.

'Well, Alfred,' he said abruptly, 'when shall we hear something of this kind about you? I did not expect you to do anything brilliant at Cambridge during the past term, but now you have had time to prepare yourself for entering the lists in earnest! I shall expect a great deal more in future, Joseph's example ought to rouse you.'

'Our cases are different, Uncle,' Alfred answered, irritated, and glad of an opportunity of declaring his resolution. 'Joseph is studying for a learned profession, and therefore it will be a great advantage to him to have taken university honours, but you know that the career I have chosen does not require any such application. Before fulfilling my promise to visit the Waters', I intended to tell you that I should prefer not to return to

Cambridge, and to obtain a commission as soon as possible.'

'Prefer not to return to Cambridge, and to obtain a commission as soon as possible? . . . I wished to be kind to you, Alfred, why then do you seek to annoy me? My life has not been so bright or happy that it needed another disappointment.'

'Uncle, there are few things that I would not rather do than annoy you. I have felt your kindness deeply, and although the army is the only profession I could ever like—it was my father's; and my mother—'

It was the first time Alfred had ever named his mother directly to Mr. Meredith, and he now stopped abruptly, vexed at his own impetuousness, and glanced hastily at Mr. Meredith's face. He read in it no expression of resentment, but only of sadness,

and was on the point of forgetting all restraint, and acknowledging the thought that had so long been burning within him—the desire to soften, as far as he could by his affection, the memory of the suffering inflicted upon Mr. Meredith by his parents—but the sound of Mrs. Bertram's dulcet tones caused him to draw back with a start.

'The best way to retain your kind uncle's favour is to try to please him by acts rather than professions,' she said in a deprecating manner. 'He has told you that if you persist in going into the army, you are to expect no assistance from him, therefore your own interest as well as the better feeling of respect towards his wishes will prompt you to resign the idea of becoming an officer.'

Poor Alfred! The generous thought that he had entertained of offering, at least, to

defer for an indefinite time his cherished project now became unbearable to him.

'I have never yet given up anything that I cared for, for the sake of my own interest, and I never will!' he answered, turning away and walking towards the window.

As he was to start at six on the following morning, he hoped to see his uncle alone before the close of the evening, in order to come to a better understanding about his desire to leave Cambridge, but Mrs. Bertram did not leave them for a moment.

'Well, Alfred, we must say farewell now, I suppose,' she said, as ten o'clock struck and Mr. Meredith stood up; 'but not for long, you will return here from Ireland, will you not? Joseph will then be here, and you can go to college together. Good-bye, and *bon voyage!*'

Alfred looked at Mr. Meredith, but he could not read in his countenance what his wishes were.

'Yes, as I start very early I suppose I had better say good-bye now,' he said hesitatingly. 'I thank you, uncle, for all your kindness, and believe me, no matter what becomes of me, that I appreciate it, and am grateful: good-bye!'

'Good-bye!' replied the old gentleman, with the same huskiness that had marked his first greeting of Alfred. 'Remember me to Lord Waters; God bless you!' and with a quick pressure of his nephew's hand he moved towards the door.

Alfred could hardly believe that they were to part thus, and he remained some time in the drawing-room, thinking that perhaps his uncle would return: for nearly an hour he

waited, but no sound of approaching steps caught his ear; at last he retired to his own room.

'My uncle must know that *I* cannot disturb him at this hour in order to continue a discussion about my future life, and surely he might have shown more interest in his orphan nephew than to allow him to go away thus, without speaking more fully about so important a subject away from the interference of a third person! Yet he has been kind to me, at times I almost fancied he was growing fond of me, and I know that I would have done anything in my power to cheer his loneliness. Poor uncle! . . . I don't think he cares for Joseph, but at least he can be proud of him as his heir—he shall not have any more trouble on my account.'

CHAPTER X.

'Celui qui *veut* une chose, en vient à bout ; mais la chose la plus difficile dans le monde, c'est de vouloir.'—LE COMTE DE MAISTRE.

MRS. BERTRAM had gained by the events of that last evening the assurance of a disagreeable truth which she had suspected for some time: namely, that her brother was more affected by a word or a look of Alfred's than by her son's greatest successes. She saw that although Mr. Meredith must approve of Joseph, his affection would be wholly given to her nephew if he were to make the slightest advance. She could not rest therefore during the whole night, she was tormented by the fear that something

might occur to bring about the mutual understanding which she so much dreaded. In the morning she seemed to be seized with an eager desire to know if her brother had passed a good night—as early as five o'clock she might have been seen standing outside the closed doors leading to his rooms, and speaking in a low voice to some one inside. Mr. Meredith's valet always slept in this antechamber.

About ten minutes before the time fixed for Alfred's departure she heard his step in the passage, and then the question, 'Is Mr. Meredith awake, Gray?'

'No, sir,' answered the servant, who appeared to be just coming from his master's room.

'Provoking!' muttered Alfred. 'But in five minutes or so I wish you would knock at

his door, and if he hears you, tell him that I should like to shake hands with him before I go.'

'I will return to the dressing-room, sir, and the first thing my master does always is to ring the bell for notice to prepare his cup of tea. As soon as I hear the bell I will do as you desire, but I could not risk his displeasure by venturing to disturb him otherwise. Of course if you wish to risk it yourself, sir —'

'No,' interrupted Alfred; 'if he has any objection to being called unexpectedly, I must not annoy him for the sake of my own pleasure. Should he ring before I start, please to tell me at once: and if not, you will tell him that I was sorry not to see him again. I shall be in my room until the carriage comes to the door.'

'Very well, sir. I will not fail to tell you if my master should ring.'

With a long-drawn breath of relief Mrs. Bertram listened to Alfred's retreating steps, and approbation of Gray's judgment and tact was silently recorded in her own mind.

Meanwhile Alfred drove off disappointed and vexed; for, in spite of all, he had expected that at least his uncle would not sleep over the hour of his departure, and would be glad to bid him a more cordial farewell. Could he have seen the sad look peering through the half-closed shutters as he entered the carriage, or heard the sigh which seemed to answer to the last sound of the quickly-moving wheels, how differently would he have felt and acted!

CHAPTER XI.

'I loved not yet, yet I longed to love . . .
I sought what I might love, in love with loving.'
ST. AUGUSTINE.

WHO, even among those to whom the morning of life is glowing with promise of a still brighter noon, can see again, after a first absence, the place where their childhood has been passed, without a momentary feeling of sadness at the consciousness that the careless happiness, or rather enjoyment—for happiness is too deep a feeling for childhood to know—of those days can never be theirs again? And when life's dawn is overcast, the sadness increases into a weary yearning to get back into the unreflecting past, and escape

from the contemplation of the dark clouds through which no gleam of a silver lining seems to pierce.

Thus it was for Alfred; and by the time he had reached half-way on the line from Dublin to Maurpton, the thought of seeing his former home again for the first time in the presence of others became so painful to him, that he got out at one of the larger towns, and by loitering there, managed to arrive a couple of hours later than the last direct train from Dublin.

The two or three porters belonging to the station gathered round him as soon as he stepped upon the platform, loudly welcoming him, and full of concern because the castle carriage had gone back without its expected guest, after the arrival of the mail. 'The cars never came to meet this short train, as

so few passengers came by it, but if his honour liked, they would send to look for one.'

The rich brogue and strong warm-hearted expressions fell strangely yet very sweetly on Alfred's ears, now unaccustomed to such tones. They brought with them a host of memories, and with a full heart he thanked his humble friends for their attention, begged them to send up his luggage as soon as possible, adding that he preferred to walk, as the evening was so fine.

Maurpton Castle was about four miles from the station. The country between was not strikingly pretty, yet on that evening, glowing with the bright tints of the western sun, which already was touching the horizon, it was not without a certain charm. The impression made by sunset has been com-

pared to the smile upon the lips of old age, both causing a gentle, sad emotion; since each ray and each smile may be the last. . . . For Alfred that impression was increased tenfold by association, and when he found himself once more in the grounds of Maurpton Castle, in sight of his old home, his courage gave way, and casting himself at the foot of an old tree where he had often conned his lessons in days gone by, he sobbed like a child.

The contrast of this return and that which he had formerly pictured to himself was too bitter. Then it was accompanied with the joyous feelings of a young officer on his first leave of absence, and for whom a proud mother's fond welcome is waiting; now it was attended by all the weary sorrow and care of a homeless orphan's condition.

What was he to do for the future? He had resolved never to go back to Chiltern Park, or ask his uncle to do anything for him; and he certainly would not remain a dependent upon Lord Waters' kindness. He had forced himself not to think of his own prospects as he travelled from England, resolved if possible to snatch a few days from worldly care, and think only of the pleasure of being again with his dear old friends. That first sight, however, of his old home, broke down the feeble barrier which he had tried to raise between himself and the future, and he sat there, he knew not how long, in gloomy meditation on his own fate, until roused by the sound of voices in the distance. The moon had risen and was casting rays of her pale light through the trees; but besides these he fancied he saw a

glimmering of something like lamps in the direction of the lake, which was nearer to the cottage than the Castle.

He moved towards the lake, keeping, however, in the shadow of the trees, and hastily trying to remove all traces of his past emotion. Sparkling among the thick ivy of the little boat-house appeared numbers of lights, and from the prows of the boats hung lamps of coloured paper. Suddenly Alfred remembered that Lord Waters had said in one of his letters: 'Maud declares that your arrival ought to be celebrated by an aquatic fête, since she heard so much of your fame as a rower at Cambridge, and expects you to show off your prowess for her good pleasure.'

At first sight Alfred had regarded this pretty display as a mere expression of fancy, now he was touched to find that there had

been a serious intention. 'And Maud has taken the trouble of planning all this for me,' he thought with a feeling of unusual pleasure. Alas! the pleasure was not to be of long duration.

In another moment a gay party came in sight, headed by Maud, and a youth, whom Alfred recognised as a former fellow-student, followed by Lord Waters, his son, the young Lord Dunallen, and two young ladies.

'Oh, how pretty the boat-house looks, Lady Maud!' exclaimed her companion. 'I have never seen anything like it, nor anything half so pretty!'

'And you laughed at my rushlights the other day when you saw the rushes peeled and dipped. I wanted to have something essentially national in my illumination, so I clung to my own idea, and rejected your

more magnificent project; was I not right?'

'Yes, but I did not know that you were such an artist; no one but yourself, Lady Maud, could have planned and executed such a tasteful and brilliant illumination with such materials.'

Alfred felt a strange and disagreeable sensation shooting through his heart, and he disliked Lord Moyston more than ever.

'What a pity it is that the hero of the fête should not have arrived, and will therefore miss seeing the triumph of taste and skill displayed in his honour,' interposed Lord Waters. 'Surely Alfred is a recreant knight to have been absent, on any account, from such an occasion. What punishment will you inflict upon him, Maud?'

'It would be hardly fair to inflict any, papa,

for at last I believe the illumination was not wholly for him. I was beginning to grow weary of the project when Lord Moyston laughed at my idea that rushlights would produce a pretty effect upon the ivy, and then of course, all my energies were aroused to prove what I could do without the aid of oil-lamps.'

Alfred retreated farther back among the trees, more vexed and angry than he liked to confess to himself. His first impulse was to return to Dublin, without seeing any of the Waters'. It was, however, only a momentary thought; what cause had he to feel angry because Lord Moyston seemed to come between him and Maud Leeson—a girl of fifteen?

'If she were older,' he thought, 'I might almost fancy myself about to fall in love with

her, which would be sheer madness in my position, even were it what it once was. But the sooner I break with all the past the better. I can never be an officer, I have no money to buy a commission, or even enough to live upon whilst preparing for the examination. I will go to Australia, the small sum which Lord Waters has of what was once my poor mother's will enable me to get there without being under obligation to anyone, and then let me be forgotten.'

A hard tearless sob rose in his throat, but he mastered it, and struck into a bye-path, which led to the lake, and advanced to join the party there.

They were still standing round the boathouse. Lord Waters turned and exclaimed: 'Here comes Alfred, by Jove!'

'A thousand welcomes my dear boy. I

am so glad to see you again; doubly glad, for now that you are here safe and sound I confess that I was really uneasy at your not appearing by the mail, and no letter came to explain the cause of your absence. How have you managed to arrive at this hour?'

'Very simply: at Athlone, where the train stops for twenty minutes, I strolled away and did not return in time; I came on afterwards by the short train, and walked from the station as there were no cars there.'

'Well, I must not keep you from Dunallen and Maud—who planned this brilliant illumination for your return; by-and-bye we will hear more of your journey.'

The uncertain light prevented the dreary expression with which these words were listened to from being noticed by Lord Waters. As Alfred turned to receive Dun-

allen's greeting, and nodded to Lord Moyston, whom he had known at Cambridge, his ill-humour yielded to the unmistakeable pleasure that beamed in Lady Maud's eyes, and gave to them that rich dark tint which sometimes caused strangers to call them black.

'Alfred, I am *so* glad to see you!' she said, giving him both her hands, yet half averting her head; and this first mingling of a maiden's shyness with the old childish freedom pleased Alfred far more even than the kiss of former days would have done. 'I have missed you so much. It has been less dull since Dick and his friend have come; but then,' in a low voice, and indicating Lord Moyston by a slight motion of her head, 'he is not an old friend of mine, like you.'

Alfred was charmed; Maud had missed

him. He did not stop to think that it was perhaps for the loss to herself that she had grieved, because there was nobody to make anything 'pleasant' to her.

'Dear little Maud! To hear that I have been missed is the sweetest of all welcomes! But this illumination—is it indeed your work, and for me? Lord Waters said something of such an intention in his last letter.'

'Yes, but you took no notice whatever of it in your hurried answer, and I had begun to think it rather a waste of trouble, since you did not seem at all flattered. Lord Moyston ridiculed the notion of my being able to make anything pretty without coloured lamps, reflectors, and what not, which he wanted to order for me from Dublin; of course I refused and resolved to show him what I could do with my own

simple materials, so after all, the illumination is rather for him than for you.'

'Then I ought to be jealous!' said Alfred, looking so pleased, however, as rather to puzzle Maud. She did not know that he had overheard nearly the same words before, and that she had now drawn out their sting; that her candour on this point assured him of the sincerity of her expressions of pleasure at his return. He need not have hesitated, Maud was too proud to feign what she did not feel.

'But this is a new friendship of Dunallen's,' he resumed, as she moved on to join the others; 'where did they meet? Moyston was at Cambridge when I first went there.'

'Yes, but he left it on account of some hurt which he received there; his estate is near Oxford, you know, and he and Dick met by chance and became intimate. Dick,

I fancy, thinks Lord Moyston's influence may be of great service to him when they are both in parliament.'

'Indeed! . . . I never liked Moyston; do you?'

But before she could answer Lord Waters called to them:

'Well, young people, if there is to be a boat-race you must lose no more time. Maud, your stars are beginning to grow fewer, and by the time the victory is won you will only have the moonlight for the ceremony of crowning the victor.'

'I have brought no crown, papa. When Alfred did not arrive we gave up the idea of a race, and merely intended to have a row on the lake. Dick is too lazy to row a race, and besides, he says he is no match for Lord Moyston.'

'Alfred is here now,' said Dunallen.

'Yes, but perhaps he is tired,' interposed Lord Waters; 'suppose we defer it until to-morrow evening?'

'Then we shall lose the pleasure of seeing it,' said the young lady who had been walking with Dick. 'Do persuade Mr. Meredith to gratify us, Lord Dunallen?'

She was very pretty, and Dunallen fancied himself in love with her; her request therefore could not be rejected.

'Come, Alfred, oblige old friends and risk the encounter even after a day's travelling. To make it worth your while, gentlemen, Maud shall give the bouquet of Forget-me-nots which she wears in her belt as a prize to the victor! Now, if either of you refuse, and I were Maud, I should never speak to so ungallant a fellow again.'

Maud took out the bouquet, tied it with her handkerchief to an oar, and held it up.

'Is it worth a contest?' she said gaily.

Her gaiety jarred upon Alfred in his present mood, and he remained silent.

'So well worth any trouble to me,' said Lord Moyston, 'that if Meredith will not accept the challenge I will row against time. You shall name a number of minutes, and if I make the tour of the lake twice within that time I shall surely merit the prize!'

'But suppose I say five minutes?' laughed Maud.

'No, no, that won't do, since it is useless to attempt an impossibility. You must name a possible time; your brother and Mr. Meredith will be good authorities to appeal to on such a point.'

'Maud, do not give your flowers to him,

a stranger,' whispered Alfred, bending over the oar so that only she could hear him.

'You could prevent them from being given to *him*,' she answered in the same low tone; 'yet perhaps you do not think them worth a little fatigue?'

'You know that it is not so,' he said reproachfully. 'I cannot forget the last time we rowed upon this lake, Maud; jesting and boat-racing are not much in harmony with such a remembrance. Nevertheless, he shall not win your flowers if I can help it! Moyston, I have been accused of shirking the contest for Lady Maud's bouquet, through indolence, and I cannot bear so unjust a reproach. You must let me be your opponent after all.'

'All right! Let us start at once, then,' replied Lord Moyston who felt tolerably sure

of winning; for, although he knew that his adversary was a good rower, he was certainly his superior when they were together at Cambridge. He did not take into account that Alfred might have improved, and that he was also familiar with every turn of the lake upon which their powers were to be tested.

Dunallen's fair friend and her younger sister were good steerers, and they willingly consented to discharge that duty; the choice of boats was given to the elder damsel, and she at once decided in favour of Lord Moyston's, knowing as clearly as if she had been told that Dunallen wished *him* to win as much as Maud desired Alfred's success.

Both brother and sister became quite excited as the rowers entered on the second

round and were evidently putting forth all their strength. Maud felt that it would be a real defeat for her, and a triumph for her brother if Lord Moyston were to win, and her eyes flashed with vexation whenever his boat appeared in advance of the other. It was decidedly so as they came round the last bend, and they all considered the race as virtually over, for Alfred appeared exhausted.

Maud's look rested upon him for an instant, and then, as if by accident, the oar to which the bouquet was tied, and which she held erect like a staff all the time, suddenly slipped from her hand and fell into the water A flush spread over Alfred's face and neck, and his boat shot forward, as if a new impetus had been given it from some hidden power, and touched the shore an instant before Lord Moyston's.

Without landing, Alfred pushed off the boat again, and a few strokes brought him up to the bouquet, which was slowly floating away. He shook the water from it and bore it back to Maud.

'I have won for you,' he murmured, as she smilingly fastened it in his coat, 'but it was hardly generous to try me so much on the first moments of my return.'

The tone of his voice betrayed the greatness of his excitement, and, wishing to spare him any further effort, she called to her father, with whom she knew that Alfred always felt at home.

'Papa, Alfred is tired, will you walk slowly towards home with him whilst I see that the boats are secured?'

CHAPTER XII.

Here every drop of honey hides a sting,
Worms wind themselves into our sweetest flowers.
COWPER.

'I WILL begin by telling you our news,' said Lord Waters taking Alfred's arm, and thereby giving his young friend time to recover himself; 'afterwards I shall expect to hear a great deal about yourself, for your letters did not tell me nearly as much as I wished to know in regard to your uncle and your own plans. Dunallen, as you know, will be of age in October, and will stand for the county at the next election, in January; he is very young, although no doubt he is older in thought than in years, and in spite

of his youth and inexperience I dare say he will be returned. He has the clergy on his side, and that is nearly half the battle.'

'This is news indeed,' answered Alfred; 'but is it known? I wonder I did not hear anything of it at the station.'

'It has been only whispered to a few familiars, it would not be well to announce it generally whilst he is still a minor. I should never have thought of such a thing for him, now, and if I were at his age I should be very sorry to get into harness so early; but Dick is ambitious, and between ourselves, a little dazzled by the revolutionary spirit of the times. When he was at home from college last Easter, Father Malone became very patriotic over his punch, one day after dinner, and said that there would be a good opportunity at the next election for many a Catho-

lic candidate who had his country's interests at heart—that is, what he, Father Malone, considered to be the country's interests—to get into Parliament. Dick half jestingly asked, "Would your reverence approve of me?" The good father was delighted to think that a young lord would support their up-rooting notions, and he at once took the matter seriously in hand. Of course I can't control Dunallen's opinions: "*In dubiis libertas!*" Nevertheless I hope and believe that nothing will cure him so quickly of what is now so speciously called Liberalism—and an *ism* it is in all conscience!—as associating with its abettors, and seeing that it leads many who are otherwise gentle, honourable, and high-minded to sympathise with crime and lawless outrage.'

'You do not then oppose his standing

on those principles, or wish him to be defeated?'

'No; because, as I have said, I believe that success, in this case, will be the best cure for his disease, and the general good will not suffer by his replacing, perhaps, a far more dangerous member. If he is returned we shall all go to London, it is well that he should have a home there during his first season. Maud will also have the advantage of the best masters. In a couple of years it will be time to think of her presentation. . . . And now that I have given you a dose of ourselves let me hear how you and Mr. Meredith agree, and if you have decided on your future career. You know that whatever interest I possess is at your service.'

'Yes, and you have always been so good to me, Lord Waters, that I would rather be

under obligation to you than to anyone in the world, but do not ask me anything about my own plans now, they are all in confusion, and I want to enjoy the present without thinking of the future, for a few days if I can. As to Mr. Meredith I don't know rightly what to say. I believe we shall always be more or less of strangers to each other, yet I have sometimes thought I could more than like him and that he also liked me; then, in a sudden fit of coldness he would seem to wish me to understand that any kindness shown to me or even respect to *her* memory was owing only to a sense of pride, to what was due to the name of Meredith. We parted coldly—but do not ask me to speak of all this to-night.'

'No, nor of anything else until you have had rest,' answered Lord Waters, for Alfred's

voice again betrayed the effort it cost him to converse. 'You are tired and excited, and when you have taken something you must go to bed without seeing the young people again, or indeed anyone save Lady Waters.'

Alfred tried to put aside all thought of the future and enjoy the pleasure, even though mingled with many sad associations, of being among old friends with whom there was a complete absence of all feeling of restraint. Everyone about the place, even the very dogs, appeared delighted to see him again; still, in spite of this general rejoicing at his return, he could not shake off the depressing feeling, especially when with little Maud and her brother, that henceforth he would have no place in their circle; and therefore his irritation against Lord Moyston whenever he

seemed to please or amuse Maud was doubly ridiculous. When she was old enough to be introduced to the world, Lord Moyston would move in the same society and have a right to pay her attention, whilst he, who had been like a brother to her, could never hope to come within reach of a smile from her.

Had Mr. Meredith, as Alfred hoped he would have done even to the last, enabled him to enter the army, he would not have been so completely separated from them, and this feeling added to his bitterness against his uncle. The more he reflected on his own position the more it appeared to him that Australia was his only resource. Lord Waters, he believed, would gladly assist him in his desire to become a soldier, but he was determined not to incur a debt, even towards him, which he could never hope to repay.

The thought of conquering his difficulties, of winning fortune after years of exile and labour, brought no feeling of elation to him. A poor officer, with nothing more than his pay, save the companionship and enjoyment of a military life, seemed to him a more enviable person than a man who had amassed wealth enough to gratify every fancy, but at a time when all the freshness of youth is gone and the thirst for enjoyment lessened without having ever been really satisfied. Alfred's real want was now, perhaps, an object great enough to recompense exertion, a passion strong enough to develop the energy and firmness which on certain occasions he seemed to possess; but which an over-indulgent education and a natural shrinking from difficulty or pain had left dormant.

For some ten days he avoided all private

conversation on his own affairs; it was the arrival of a letter from Joseph Bertram, that determined him to do this no longer. Lord Waters was generally to be found in his study about six o'clock in the afternoon, preparing his letters for the late post. Alfred went to seek him, having resolved to speak his mind fully. Lord Waters was not there, however, and Alfred learned from one of the servants that he was in the grounds with his friend Sir Thomas Blackney, and that Sir Thomas would remain for dinner.

Having at last summoned up courage to speak to Lord Waters, Alfred was vexed at this disappointment; the disagreeable task was still before him, and it was not easy for him to sustain the effort he had made to meet it in expectation of getting it over at once. He came down to dinner with some irritation in

his mind against Sir Thomas, yet the ladies had hardly left the dining-room before his irritation changed into something very like gratitude.

'Then your Lordship wishes that Dawson should be allowed to send in his resignation?' said Sir Thomas abruptly, as if alluding to some former conversation. 'He deserves to be cashiered!'

Lord Waters was Colonel, and Sir Thomas Blackney Lieutenant-Colonel of the County Militia, which was stationed at the Curragh but under marching orders for Aldershot; and Dawson was a junior ensign, who had committed a grave fault against military discipline and was then under arrest.

'Perhaps so, Blackney, but he is very young and a widow's only son. Let us be merciful and give him a chance of getting into

another regiment or of starting fair in some other way. Confound the fellow, I tried to do something for him without requiring any greater exertion on his part than to conduct himself steadily. I told him I would get him the needful number of men to volunteer into the line. I had even begun to arrange it and he would have got his commission without purchase and without any examination—now he has spoiled it all.'

Alfred felt as if a heavy weight had suddenly been lifted from his heart, there would now be a vacancy in Lord Waters' own regiment, and he would doubtless do for him what he had been willing to do for a comparative stranger; if so, he need not exile himself, and his old desire to be a soldier would be gratified without incurring obligation to anyone or running the risk of failure

at the examination. He did not doubt of himself; he knew that his pride, if nothing else, would save him from getting into debt or other serious difficulty, and bright thoughts of glory and distinction began to take the place of his former dreary anticipations.

'I told you he would never do any good in the regiment when I saw him before he entered,' said Sir Thomas, 'but you *would* try him, and see what has resulted. Just as we are about to move we shall be tormented with applications for the vacancy.'

'Will you give it to me, Lord Waters? asked Alfred with great eagerness.

'To *you*, Alfred? And your uncle ——' But Lord Waters was so much taken by surprise that he could go no further, and sat looking at Alfred as if he thought the boy had been seized with a fit of temporary insanity.

'For goodness' sake, Waters, let us have no more of your favourites, they all turn out such worthless fellows!' exclaimed Sir Thomas, who was bluff even to rudeness.

Alfred coloured to his very temples. Lord Waters however was so accustomed to Sir Thomas that he seldom took notice of his rough speeches, further than to show that they never deterred him from acting as he thought fit.

'I don't understand why Alfred wishes to enter the militia, there certainly is no necessity for it,' he said quietly; 'but if he were to take Dawson's place he would not give you any additional cause to complain of my favourites.'

'You may depend upon me for that, Lord Waters, and I beg you to give me the ap-

pointment,' added Alfred earnestly; 'indeed I do want it.'

'Well, well—we shall see!' replied Lord Waters. 'Sir Thomas, you do not take any wine?'

The conversation drifted to other subjects and Alfred talked and laughed with almost his old light-heartedness, so excited was he by the new prospect which had appeared before him. . .

CHAPTER XIII.

He can see into that which he cannot see through. It is not the darkness, but the muchness of the water that hinders the eye from penetrating.—THOMAS T. LYNCH, *Memorials of Theophilus Trinal.*

'Now Alfred, tell me what was the meaning of your eagerness last night to get that ensigncy in our militia? Have you quarrelled with your uncle? I have been afraid of it since I saw you so disinclined to speak of your own plans, yet I did not like to worry you with questions. In any case, however, I should think he would purchase a commission for you!'

'Indeed he would not, Lord Waters. He told me that he would never sanction my

choice of the army as a profession, and that, if I persisted in it, I must never expect assistance from him. I would not yield to a threat and purchase his favour by a sacrifice of my own inclinations. I had even resolved to ask you to give me the little you have of mine that I might go to Australia. The thought of such banishment was very dreadful, and I had not the courage to talk to you about it, until a letter from my cousin Bertram showed me that I am expected to return to Cambridge, and made me feel that I must come to a decision at once. I went to look for you yesterday afternoon and heard that you were with Sir Thomas ; after dinner, on hearing what you had intended to do for Dawson the hope came that I might yet be an officer. If you will but do for me what you would have done for him you will make

me more happy and more grateful than words can say!'

'Certainly, my dear boy, if you can show me that it will be for your good; but you must first consult your uncle, let him have the option of behaving—I will not say generously towards you, since to give you a fair start, to get you a commission in a proper way, is but what he ought to do; and indeed I am sure he would not approve of your creeping into the army through the militia, as if you had neither the means nor the education to get there in a more regular way.'

'I do not think he cares what becomes of me if I venture to thwart his will,' exclaimed Alfred, bitterly; 'he allowed me to come away without giving me an opportunity of speaking to him alone about my own affairs; he hardly wished me good-bye on the previous

night, and when I conquered my pride sufficiently to ask to see him in the morning, his servant said he was asleep and must not be disturbed. I will write to him, but only when I can say that you have promised me an ensigncy in your regiment. To ask his consent would appear like begging him to retract his decision not to aid me unless I choose to be led altogether by his will. I will never even seem to ask him for anything, Lord Waters, and if you will not give me the ensigncy, I must fall back upon the Australian plan.'

'Between sentiveness and pride, Alfred, I am afraid you will come to grief some day, and believe me you will never be a happy man unless you get rid of a little of one, or indeed of both. . . I will give you the promise you wish for on the condition that you write

to your uncle before I publicly nominate you to the post, and if he does not make you any better offer within a week, you shall be Dawson's successor. Remember, however, that in writing to Mr. Meredith, you speak of it only as a promise, so that he may feel there is still time for him to propose any arrangement that he may prefer.'

Accordingly, two days later, Mr. Meredith received the following letter :—

'MY DEAR UNCLE,—You will not be very angry with me, I hope, when I tell you that I have asked and obtained from Lord Waters the promise of an ensigncy in his militia regiment, from which I shall soon be able to volunteer into the line. Lord Waters urged me to consult you before I abandoned all idea of obtaining a direct commission, but

he was obliged to admit that in so doing I should appear to be asking you to assist me, in spite of your definite declaration that I must not expect you to interest yourself any further on my account if I persisted in a course which you disapproved of so much. As I was not willing to sacrifice my desire of following my father's profession, the only act of submission I could show towards you is not to seek to alter your determination in my regard. It is true, perhaps, that there is not much merit in such submission, as I know how unalterable are your decisions, yet believe that I sincerely wished to pay you a mark of deference.

'Your affectionate Nephew,

'ALFRED MEREDITH.'

Mr. Meredith answered in a few formal

lines, to the effect that his nephew had of course been free to follow his own inclinations without reference to his approbation, and wished him success in his new career.

'It is the old story,' murmured Mr. Meredith as he sealed the envelope. 'I cannot stoop to defend myself, to show that I am not so hard and immovable as those whom I have loved best choose to believe. Like his parents this boy considers it useless to attempt to win me to indulgence, and therefore he renders it impossible for me to show how willingly I should be persuaded to forgive, and to retract my own hasty declarations. . . Joseph, after all, must be my adopted son, my heir; he at least gives as much as he receives; it is in his case satisfaction and respect for kindness and protection; but I could have loved the other had he not

judged me hardly and shown that his only feeling towards me is indifference. As it is, I cannot thrust favours and affection upon him. All ties are now broken between us.'

Mrs. Bertram had recognised Alfred's writing as Mr. Meredith read the letter; and, although he made no comment on its contents, she judged by the expression of his countenance that it had not given him pleasure. She, however, hesitated to ask any questions, and in the afternoon all other thoughts were forgotten in the joy of her son's arrival a day earlier than had been expected.

'It will soon be time to return to Cambridge,' said Joseph in the evening, after he had been discussing his Swiss tour. 'When will Alfred come back?'

Guiltless of participating in, and even unaware of, his mother's efforts to prevent a

good understanding between his uncle and Alfred, Joseph felt no awkwardness in asking about him.

'He is not coming back,' replied Mr. Meredith; 'Lord Waters has promised him a commission in his militia regiment, and he hopes eventually to be able to volunteer into the line.'

Mrs. Bertram became radiant.

'But I thought you had forbidden the army,' continued Joseph.

'I had no right to forbid anything to one who owes me no obedience. I merely told Alfred that he must not expect me to interest myself in him if he persisted in adopting a profession which he knew I disapproved of.'

'And, having gone his own way, I suppose he expects to be taken back into favour, like all the rest of those impulsive fellows who

fancy that no one can have the heart to refuse their prayers for forgiveness.'

'It is not a case for forgiveness,' answered Mr. Meredith testily, 'nor has it been asked for. Alfred was free to withdraw himself from my protection if he felt it too great a restraint upon his own tastes; he has done so and has accepted the consequence—that henceforth he is to expect neither support nor aid from me.'

Mrs. Bertram looked down, fearing to betray her joy at this intelligence. It did not escape Joseph, however, and he understood her thought that Alfred's wilfulness had removed from his path a rival to Mr. Meredith's fortune. Joseph did not perhaps desire this inheritance less than his mother desired it for him, with this difference however, that he would not have condescended to intrigue for

it as she had done; he would work silently and unremittingly for anything that he desired, but he would not employ unfair means to get a rival out of his way. Mrs. Bertram knew all this, and therefore she had taken care not to tell him how large had been her share in causing the misunderstanding between Alfred and her brother.

CHAPTER XIV.

I hold him great who, for love's sake,
Can give with generous, earnest will—
Yet he that takes for love's sweet sake,
I think I hold more generous still.

MISS PROCTOR, *Maximus.*

SHORTLY after the Christmas holidays the Waters' went to London, as Lord Dunallen was to take his seat in the House of Commons. In the following March, some six months after Alfred had joined the Militia, he was enabled to volunteer into a regiment of Her Majesty's ——th Light Infantry, then under orders for India. The only regret he felt on leaving England was the thought of bidding farewell to the

Waters', yet he could not spare himself the pain of a last meeting and take leave of them by letter as he would have done had they been at Maurpton Castle, since he was obliged to go to London in order to make the necessary preparations.

Lord Waters had ordered a handsome outfit as a farewell gift, but as soon as Alfred heard of it his pride rebelled; he could not bear to accept money—and the outfit seemed but a delicate way of giving it to him—from one upon whom he had no claim, and he insisted that the order should be countermanded.

'I did not think you would reject my present, Alfred, and thus treat me as a stranger,' Lord Waters at length said reproachfully. 'I have felt like a father towards you, and I may not live to see you again; you

will perhaps live to regret that your last act before we parted for ever on earth, was to refuse me the right to help you a little.'

Alfred looked up, startled, and it struck him that Lord Waters appeared strangely aged since he had seen him at Maurpton Castle: a keen pang shot through his heart, and he felt that the pride which prompted him to refuse the gift of such a friend, and at such a moment, did seem somewhat ungrateful.

'I will not refuse any right so claimed, Lord Waters!' he exclaimed with his old impetuosity; adding with a smile intended to hide his emotion, 'but I only accept your present on condition that you promise to remain young long enough to ride a hunt with me in honour of my return some ten years hence, should I escape the destructive

tendencies of the sun and the climate of India.'

'Well then, since this important matter is satisfactorily settled, let us take a stroll in the park' . . . .

'And, as my present will be too insignificant, there is no need that you should be pressed to accept it, Alfred,' said Maud, who had come into the room unperceived; and as her father took up his hat she held out to Alfred a chain made of little black shiny rings. 'Yet I expect you to value it, at least as much as papa's, if only for the sake of the pretty dead favourite—my pony, which I rode for the first time on the day when you were to have ridden Mercury. I have worked the chain from some of the long hair of his beautiful mane which I had kept by me. Horsehair does not wear out, so it depends on

yourself to preserve this joint remembrance of two old playfellows, one of whom is gone.'

'If I live to come home, Maud, you shall see me wear your chain proudly; and, if I never return, it shall be buried with me far away from all the bright and sad associations which it recalls so vividly.'

He kissed her forehead and hastened after Lord Waters, who had already left the room. And it so happened that he never saw Maud again before leaving England: on that same afternoon she went with her governess on a visit to a young friend at Brighton.

CHAPTER XV.

Générosité est sœur de vaillance et de prud' homie.
ADAGE DU VIEUX TEMPS.

ALFRED'S regiment had been about a year in India before the breaking out of the fearful mutiny which from June 1857 swept over the greater part of our Indian possessions for the space of nearly three years, when sedition was uttering its own poisonous whispers in every bazaar, and swaying the minds not only of the evil and ignorant rabble, but, strange to say, of the more enlightened and socially elevated natives, who had nothing to gain and everything to lose by the overthrow of the English rule.

The ——th was quartered at one of the large stations in the Punjaub, and had already helped to give the mutineers more than one severe lesson of what English energy and courage could do, when, together with a company of European artillery, it was ordered to Mungur, garrisoned chiefly by native troops, whose allegiance could hardly be depended upon should the mutiny spread successfully in that direction; and, very shortly after the reinforcement had arrived, intelligence was received that the native regiments at an important and distant station had mutinied and gained possession of it, whilst the garrison of Europeans had been forced to retreat to the fort, and must perish miserably, with large numbers of women and children, unless immediately relieved.

In connection with the civil authorities, and

with admirable promptitude, Colonel Farquharson, the commanding officer at Mungur, succeeded in disarming the native force without bloodshed, and, having appointed a sufficient guard to hold Mungur in security, he determined to make for the besieged station in one forced march, even under such a sun. It was a daring project, but Colonel Farquharson felt that the only chance of success with so small a relieving force as he could command was to take the enemy by surprise, and he knew what the men of the ——th and of the brave European artillery were: accordingly, and although many fell out from exhaustion and sun-stroke, the feat was accomplished.

His plan succeeded so far that he not only surprised and annihilated an advanced post which the mutineer chief had placed to guard

the road, but he fell upon the besiegers so unexpectedly that at the first outset they were driven back in confusion. Rapidly recovering, however, the enemy fell upon their assailants and endeavoured to gain time to turn their guns so as to play, no longer upon the puttagh, but upon those who had so unexpectedly come to relieve it.

It was a critical moment for the relieving force. The sudden attack upon the enemy and their retreat had unfortunately brought Colonel Farquharson's little troop between their own guns and the enemy, so that the guns would not be available for some minutes; on the other hand retreat was impossible before a rallying enemy, whilst to remain where they were entailed inevitable destruction. Suddenly a handful of men, headed by Ensign Meredith, were seen to detach them-

selves from the force which was guarding the right flank. Dashing forward for some distance, then wheeling to the left, they attacked the reserve of the enemy, cutting through it flankwise by sheer force of arms. Nearly two-thirds of their number were sacrificed, but the remainder reached the guns and began to spike them, being all the time under a heavy fire of grape. An exulting cheer from the besieged in the fort greeted the achievement of this gallant deed, and Colonel Farquharson, regaining position, rushed up to support them. The enemy, disheartened, and deprived of his most effective guns, wavered, and was finally forced back from the outer entrenchments, when the fall of night put a stop to all active struggle for the time being.

Colonel Farquharson's first act on the cessa-

tion of firing was to seek out Ensign Meredith, whom he found leaning against a fragment of wall, half fainting from exhaustion and the pain of a deep wound in his left arm; and having caused the wound to be attended to, he publicly complimented the young ensign and his brave followers on their gallant conduct. With the rest of the wounded Alfred was then sent into the Alum Bagh—a deserted house which the besiegers had neglected to guard, not fearing any attack, especially from that side on which the advanced post had been stationed—as it was feared his wound would prove dangerous.

At dawn next morning, however, all were roused from their supposed security by the furious attack of a large reconnoitring party of mutineers, who had been absent on the previous day, and who had learned from a

traitorous sepoy that the wounded had been sent into this house under the protection of a small company of Europeans, headed by their captain. Thirsting for bloodshed and rapine, the mutineers had succeeded in forcing their entrance into the garden, and retreat to the main body of the relieving army seemed the only chance of escape for the little guard within the Alum Bagh, and for those of the wounded not quite disabled. It was a terrible alternative for Captain Norman to abandon the badly wounded to their fate, or expose the whole of his troop and those who could move to what appeared a hopeless resistance. He felt that he had no right to sacrifice the greater to the lesser number, and at length, in an unsteady voice he gave the command to retreat, ordering the slightly wounded to go first, whilst he and

his men still kept up the fire upon the enemy.

'Ensign Meredith, you have heard the order that the wounded who are able to move are to retire without delay to the main body, whilst we cover your retreat,' said Captain Norman addressing Alfred, who, in spite of his wound was actively aiding to keep the enemy at bay, and had paid no heed to the order for retreat.

'You will not wait for me, Captain Norman,' replied Alfred calmly, 'but allow me to remain with my fellow wounded comrades; some of them will be able to assist me in firing, and the helpless will not be murdered without a struggle to prevent it.'

'But it is madness for you to remain! God knows, I would rather die than desert our poor comrades if I saw a chance of being

able to save them. As it is I do not dare to doom all the lives under my charge to certain death. What good then can you, almost single handed, do for the poor wounded ?'

'I can die with them, and spare them the pang of feeling that they are left to meet their death wholly undefended. Of course it is your duty to go, and in your place I would do as you will do, but in mine I will stay. You have no time to lose, and your sacrifice is perhaps greater than mine; my life is my own to give, and could it be given for a more glorious cause ?'

A few others rallied round him, and so untiringly did they labour that the fire of the dreaded rifles seemed to blaze forth from every window in turn, carrying death among the assailants, impressing them with the idea that their adversaries were far more numer-

ous than they really were, and keeping them at bay for nearly two hours, whilst in the distance the fighting raged fiercely round the entrenchments.

There are limits, however, to all human exertion, and the devoted little band of defenders were becoming slowly, but too surely, beaten by numbers; each man felt, as another and another of his companions fell, that the fatal moment was fast approaching when they should all be at the mercy of the inhuman butchers, whose atrocities had already caused the blood of the coldest-hearted to boil with horror and indignation. Alfred still cheered on his brave supporters, although none saw more clearly than he did that their hour was come; but, just as a ball struck him in the head, the relieving force had blown up the last stronghold of the rebels,

and they drew off the guards from one of the gates overlooking the Alum Bagh; upon which, the relieved garrison sallied out impetuously and dashed to the rescue of their helpless countrymen. With a yell of fury at having their prey thus snatched from them at the very moment when they had made sure of seizing upon it, the mutineers turned and fled.

The relieved and relieving forces now met, and the rout was soon complete: although the victors had only a very small troop of cavalry they succeeded in falling upon the flank of the enemy, and began to pay off old scores with dire will. The little troop of cavalry followed them up closely, cutting down the fugitives without mercy, until their officer, reflecting on the imprudence of being too far separated from their party, ordered a retreat

to be sounded, and they arrived in time to hear the loud applause of the whole force, as the General, standing at the entrance to the fort, and at the head of the bier upon which the insensible form of Ensign Meredith had been carried up from the Alum Bagh, announced that he deemed the young officer to have most nobly won the Victoria Cross, and expressed an earnest hope that he might recover from his wounds, and live to receive it.

CHAPTER XVI.

Words are mighty, words are living
  Serpents with their venomous stings;
Or bright angels crowding round us,
  With heaven's light upon their wings.

MISS PROCTOR.

NEARLY four years had elapsed since Alfred had left England, when he was ordered to a station high up in the country, and on arriving there he was delighted to hear the sound of a familiar name—a name connected with bygone times. The medical officer of the station was brother to the Rector of Chiltern, Mr. Meredith's most intimate friend.

Alfred rarely heard from Europe. Lord and Lady Waters were both dead, and Lord

Dunallen's, or rather the present Lord Waters' last letter, announcing his father's death, was now many months old. It was a precious letter to Alfred, because it enclosed a few lines from Maud, written in the first burst of her grief. The only person she had yet really loved was her father, and instinctively she turned to Alfred for sympathy in such a loss, believing that he would feel it more perhaps than her brother. He had answered that letter with a full heart, but had not ventured to ask her to continue the correspondence, and thus, as Lord Waters was too indifferent or too much occupied to write, Alfred heard as little of them as of his uncle and cousin.

From Dr. Mordaunt he learned that the Bertrams now lived at Chiltern Park. Joseph had taken his degree as a physician, and although

he did not practise, his name was becoming known by his articles in one of the leading scientific publications. It was generally supposed that he would be Mr. Meredith's heir, and therefore it was but natural that he should not trouble himself about advancing in his profession. He generally spent the season in London, and, among others, had become intimate with Lord Waters. This last piece of news caused Alfred to feel a sting of jealousy. Joseph, an intimate friend of Maud, moving in the same circle with her, and the presumed heir to Chiltern Park! Every advantage seemed to be given to him, and for a moment Alfred felt bitterly towards his cousin; then, ashamed of such churlishness, he tried to persuade himself that he would rather Joseph should win her than a stranger; moreover, it was really a matter of

indifference to him, he thought, whom she married, and he sought to banish any vain repining by engaging heartily in all the gaiety of the station.

The great distinction he had earned during the mutiny caused him to be more or less treated as a hero wherever he went. Many were the bright eyes that watched his coming and going, and he would have found no difficulty in obtaining a fair and rich young bride; but, although he amused himself and was very free with most of the pretty girls who came in his way, he never gave any of them a right to expect an offer of marriage from him. Unacknowledged to himself, he was always comparing them to the imperious little beauty who had tyrannised over his boyhood, and none of them ever rivalled the image he had pictured of her, in

the fulness of her charms; but even had there been no such vague clinging to the past, he knew that glory and a captain's pay would seem but a poor recommendation to fathers and brothers to bestow their dear ones on him, and he would never have submitted to cold looks and slighting reflections about his want of fortune.

He had not been long at the new station when a moonlight pic-nic was arranged to the deserted and half-ruined palace of some ancient Begum. It was the first time Alfred had been there, and Dr. Mordaunt, who was an antiquary, and delighted in relating old stories connected with ruins, immediately siezed upon the new-comer, to show him the wonders and beauties of the place.

Alfred really liked the good doctor, nevertheless, he was not exactly the companion

he would have chosen to saunter with through those solemn-looking cypress avenues, tinged with that radiant light which precedes the fall of night. With slightly wandering attention he listened to the historical recollections of the place until, after mentioning a curious trait of religious belief prevalent in the district, Dr. Mordaunt said he had sent a detailed account of it to his brother, the Rector.

'And have you heard from him lately?' interrupted Alfred, stopping as they came to the end of the avenue, and resting his arm upon the fragment of wall overlooking the river.

'Yes, I have just had a letter from him: you were named in it, although he little thinks you are at this very station. Mr. Meredith has been ailing for some time, and

constantly speaks of you, but only to my brother.'

Alfred looked up as if in expectation of hearing more, and Dr. Mordaunt who, when not on his antiquarian hobby, was very quick at reading characters, saw something in Alfred's countenance that betrayed mingled pleasure and regret, as well as unusual interest.

'Perhaps you would like to see the letter, my young friend?' he said abruptly, and, without waiting for an answer, he took it out of his pocket-book and handed it to Alfred.

It spoke of Mr. Meredith as breaking in health, and also of his frequent allusion to his brother's son, when alone with the rector, although in the presence of others he never named him. 'It is evident,' the last paragraph said, 'that Mr. Meredith is hurt at not

having gained the affection and confidence of his nephew, towards whom he felt more than the attraction of relationship. As the child of the only woman he ever really loved, Alfred Meredith might have been his uncle's idol, and the comfort of his old age, had he not shown so utter an absence of all good feeling towards him as never to seek him after a few hasty words spoken on the evening previous to his departure from Chiltern Park, more than four years ago; and Mr. Meredith is too proud to offer pardon and affection to one who seemed not to value them. Even I did not know all this until now; it is only since he has been ailing that my poor old friend has disclosed the secret wounds of his over-sensitive nature, which he had but too well disguised under an appearance of almost callous formality.'

'Uncle, forgive me for having so misunderstood you!' murmured Alfred to himself; then he added aloud, as he returned the letter: 'Dr. Mordaunt, have you ever known two persons united in reality by a strong and indissoluble tie, one upon which death had set his seal, to shrink from the most ordinary marks of attachment, each fearing that the other might not value them or might attribute them to interested motives? This has been the case between my uncle Meredith and me.'

'How so? You don't mean to say that you felt any affection for him?' replied Dr. Mordaunt, evidently surprised. 'If you had done so you would not in the first instance have left his house without trying to see him, after there had been hasty words between you.'

'But it is not so! I went to the door of his room twice before starting in the morning, and although my uncle well knew the hour at which I was to start, he quietly slept on or pretended to sleep, and his servant would not venture to disturb him. Perhaps he had been so ordered. I desired him to tell my uncle that I was sorry not to see him again and say good-bye. I was so hurt at this marked proof of indifference in one towards whom I felt an inexpressible attraction from the first time I saw him, that I could hardly hide my grief as I left the house, and, to my greater confusion, I heard one of the housemaids remark, "Poor young gentleman, he looks very down-hearted!" Even afterwards I cannot say how much I longed for a kind word in answer to my letter from Maurpton Castle, saying that Lord Waters had promised

me an ensigncy in his militia regiment; but there came a cold acknowledgment of its receipt, and then, indeed, I believed that he was glad to get rid of me—that he could not conquer his dislike and even resentment against me as the son of one who had inflicted pain upon him.'

'Then, in the name of goodness, when you were with your uncle why did you not show him the affection that you felt for him?'

'Because he was rich and I was poor,' answered Alfred, colouring. 'He let it appear that any kindness shown to me was from a proud sense of what was fitting for a Meredith; and, had I appeared to thrust affection upon him it might have been attributed to the hope of flattering him into leaving me some of his fortune. Even if such a thought did not occur to him, others, one person at

least, would have suggested it to him. If he could but know how often I have wished that he were poor in order that I might be as a son to him, and try to obliterate a little of the sorrow which my mother caused him long ago! . . . You know, of course, that she was to have married him?'

'Yes, I knew him well in those days, and it is the strong resemblance between you, although in many things you are so different, which has kept you apart. You have both the same keen sensitiveness about being appreciated as you really are. But, now that you know how much he desired your affection and that your want of confidence is a source of suffering to him, will you not clear up the unfortunate misunderstanding which made you both put on an appearance of coldness which you did not feel?'

'How can I clear it up? I would give worlds that uncle Meredith should understand my true feeling towards him; but a letter full of professions, now when I hear that he is failing, would indeed look as if it came from a hope to be remembered in his will. I would not hesitate to incur the suspicions of others if I had any means of proving to *him* how much it cost me not to receive from him, before leaving Maurpton Castle, one cordial expression of desire to hear from me . . . but I can give no proof and I could not bear that he should think me capable of professing for him at such a time as this affection of which I had never given any sign during all these past years.'

Dr. Mordaunt was too good a judge of character to urge upon Alfred the reflection that where interest can be promoted by a

sincere expression of feeling it is more than exaggerated to refrain from it. The point to be gained, he well understood, was to induce him to forget all question of interest or of himself in the matter.

'Think a little, my young friend, and see whether you are not now actuated by selfishness.'

'By selfishness, Dr. Mordaunt?'

'Yes, by selfishness! You will not write the simple truth to your uncle and brighten up his last days because you fear that, if your letter does not carry conviction with it, it might lower you in his estimation. If you could forget yourself, do you suppose that you would hesitate to write to him?'

'I believe there is some truth in what you say,' replied Alfred, after a moment's silence, yet I cannot help hesitating, I cannot resolve

to give my uncle any possible cause to suspect me of seeking his forgiveness for the sake of being remembered in his will. If I could muster courage enough to make the trial—'

'What? You, Captain Meredith, talk of mustering courage! Who would believe it?'

'Ah! It requires more courage to submit to be doubted by one to whom I am bound by so tender a tie, than to meet single-handed an army of enemies.'

'No doubt, but your courage so far surpasses ordinary courage that one gave you credit for true bravery! Well, I hear the music, so I must not detain you any longer. The poor Begum's history will have but little charm for you now that the dancing is about to begin.'

'Indeed, I would far rather remain away: what you have told me has driven from

me all desire for gaiety—the fairest of the fair ones here would have no attractions for me to-day. Come into that long alley and let me hear the conclusion of the history which your brother's letter interrupted.'

'That you may dream of the past whilst pretending to listen to me, eh? An old doctor may be treated in this fashion, but it would hardly succeed with Miss M——! I will be forgiving, however, and show you the grounds, although I will not be foolish enough to waste my historical lore upon you merely for the pleasure of listening to myself.'

Alfred smiled, convinced that the worthy doctor would soon forget his resolution and mount his pet hobby, when *he* would be able to give full liberty to his own thoughts.

CHAPTER XVII.

'Les occasions nous font connaître aux autres et à nous-mêmes. – LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

SEVERAL weeks passed away and neither Dr. Mordaunt nor Alfred made any allusion to their conversation about Mr. Meredith. Alfred seemed only to think about his pleasures, and was foremost in arranging picnic parties and other diversions, at which he was profuse in his gallantries to Miss M——, the reigning belle. Yet even in the midst of the gayest scenes the thought would occur to him of Maud's exclamation years ago, when he was tempted to break a promise and ride Mercury because he could not endure

the imputation of lacking courage: 'Papa, I do not think men brave.' Dr. Mordaunt had made a very similar remark; was it then both selfish and cowardly in him not to write to his uncle and try to give him pleasure, through fear of being suspected of false and unworthy motives? This importuning thought gave him no rest; at length he could bear it no longer, and one morning he sought out Dr. Mordaunt.

'Have you heard from your brother lately?' said Alfred, hesitating a little at first.

'No, not since I received the letter which I showed to you. There has been one mail in since, and another was expected yesterday; but at these distant stations one cannot count to a day or two upon the arrival of letters. To-day the mail goes out I am

writing to my brother, do you wish to send any message for Mr. Meredith?'

'I wish you would enclose this for him in your letter,' said Alfred, holding out a note with a half-guilty expression, 'and ask your brother to be kind enough to read it, and if he approves, to give it to my uncle. . . . A fellow who has faced death in every form without shrinking, does not like to acknowledge himself unable to conquer fear of another kind, and to accept the accusation of selfishness,' he added, trying to cover his momentary confusion with a laugh.

'Now that is what I call real bravery!' exclaimed Dr. Mordaunt, 'and you see what good has been done by my desire to make you conversant with the old Begum's history in connection with those ruins. If I had not chanced to take you away from your gay

companions, and had that quiet talk with you, I should never have thought of showing you my brother's letter, for I quite believed you were indifferent towards—and, indeed, angry with—your uncle. *Vive* the Begum and the old legends!'

Dr. Mordaunt purposely rambled on in order to give Alfred time to recover his composure.

'I cannot say whether I shall be grateful to them or not. I am not much of a believer in the doctrine that virtue is its own reward, save to your very perfect people, perhaps; on the contrary I know I shall curse my unlucky stars if the faintest doubt is cast upon my motives by my uncle, and if it leads to a remembrance in his will of a hundred pounds to buy a mourning ring as an acknowledgment of the trouble I took to

flatter him at the eleventh hour. If it should produce any such result I believe I shall hate you, Dr. Mordaunt.'

Dr. Mordaunt laughed heartily at the energetic manner in which this last sentiment was uttered.

'It is fair of you, at all events, to give me notice, and so enable me to keep out of your way should the letter not produce the desired effect. But it is surely a novelty to tell a man that you will hate him should he be the means of procuring you a legacy! And now will you take a canter with me?'

Immediately after his first conversation with Alfred at the evening pic-nic, Dr. Mordaunt had written to his brother, and related as far as possible in Alfred's own words, what he had said regarding his uncle, and of his hesitation to attempt any explana-

tion, fearing to appear interested in gaining Mr. Meredith's favour. Dr. Mordaunt asked if they knew that Alfred had so anxiously tried to see his uncle on the morning when he set out for Ireland, as it did not appear that Mr. Meredith remembered this? and if the servant had neglected to tell him, he ought to be severely reprimanded.

Dr. Mordaunt little knew what commotion that letter would cause at Chiltern Park. Mr. Meredith sobbed like a child on reading it, but quickly recovering he sent for his servant. Taken by surprise, Gray hesitated when questioned as to why he had said his master was asleep when Mr. Alfred asked to see him before going away; then he became confused; and finally confessed that Mrs. Bertram had desired him to say so, as to see Mr. Alfred, she said, would only agitate her

brother; who, however, must not know that she had interfered, as he might think her over-anxious about his health.

The next day Mrs. Bertram was filled with consternation at meeting the lawyer coming from the library, and learning that Mr. Meredith had just signed a new will. Of its contents she could discover nothing; she could only see that her brother was much excited, although to herself his manner was colder than she had ever known it before. She did venture, as by chance, to allude to India, and asked if he had heard from Alfred; but there was something sternly triumphant in the tone of his curt 'No!' which increased her alarm and mystification.

CHAPTER XVIII.

How near are two hearts when there is no deceit between them.—CHINESE PROVERB.

ON the very day after Alfred's letter had been despatched, there came one to him from his uncle. His surprise, on seeing the handwriting, was very great, and he opened it eagerly, wondering what could have induced his uncle to write to him.

'Would that I could impart to you something of the joy you have afforded me, Alfred, by your conversation with Dr. Mordaunt, and I believe you would be rewarded for your noble self-condemnation to poverty! My boy, you can never know how

dear you became to me from the moment I first saw you; every look, tone, and word recalled to me the two beings whom I loved best — your mother, and my brother; but they, as I thought, had deemed me cold and resentful, since, after the first moment of my bitter disappointment, when I hardly knew what I was saying, they never sought the forgiveness and friendship which my heart was yearning to give to them, but which I was too proud to offer. I could not stoop to show that I was more generous in heart than they appeared to think. Now I understand, that they, like yourself, may have hesitated to court one who had it in his power to bestow favours, and who ought, therefore, to have been the first to make the advance. . . . Ah! I see my own fault now, when it is too late, in regard to them at least—to

enjoy the affection that might have been mine, and for which I so pined. Morbidly susceptible on the subject of my outward unattractiveness, I grew stiff and reserved, and then was hurt because those whom I loved did not see through the mask, and give me credit for warm and generous feeling! Once or twice you had almost broken down the barrier, and would have done so completely, had you not been prevented from coming to me at last. They shall regret it who interfered to keep us apart! . . . Get leave of absence as quickly as you can, for my time in this world will not be long, and come to brighten the days of your old uncle, to whom you are very dear for your own sake, and still more so as the child of her who gave him all the brief happiness as well as the lasting sorrow of his life.'

'What a fine old fellow he is!' exclaimed Alfred to himself; 'how glad I shall be to make him forget his loneliness, and see his face light up with interest as I tell him tales of the mutiny, and know that he can be proud of his soldier nephew, as well as of the learned one! He will grow young again in feeling that at last he is known and cared for in spite of all the trouble he took to conceal his goodness. Hurrah! for the days when all stiffness will be at an end between us!'

He lost no time in forwarding his application for leave of absence, and then he went to Dr. Mordaunt.

'What a nice person you are to talk freely to!' cried Alfred gaily, as he met his good friend. 'You have sent a despatch to England with an account of all I said to you!'

'Well, and do you hate me for it? I have

won for you the promise of a hundred pounds to buy a mourning ring.'

'No, indeed, my uncle has shown what precious metal he is made of. Another would have talked of generous intentions towards me and have made me feel as if, after all, I must be paid for having been drawn towards him in spite of his apparent coldness; but he evidently never thought of his money, he knew instinctively that any allusion to it would have marred my pleasure in going to him. Fancy then whether I am more inclined to hate you or to regard you as one of my best friends for having drawn out towards me so delicate a character as Mr. Meredith's. But why did you urge me so much to write myself?'

'Because I believed it was due to your uncle. I am delighted that your letter had

gone before the arrival of Mr. Meredith's letter. Think what additional pleasure it will give him to find that you could conquer your pride—and pride of the same nature as his own—so far as to run the risk of being regarded as a legacy hunter, in order, if possible, to remove from his mind an impression which gave him pain. I did not tell you I was going to write to my brother, for I thought it better to act on my own responsibility and leave the rest between you and Mr. Meredith. The servant's unwilling acknowledgment of his own falsehood was of course more than sufficient testimony in your favour, had you needed any beyond that of your own words to me, which you certainly did not on your uncle's account, but it was as well to have it, for others.'

'But what could be the man's object in

deceiving me? Some one must have told him to do it, and to whom could it have been of any service to prejudice my uncle against me, save the Bertrams? Joseph, I know, would not stoop to tamper with a servant for any object whatever, moreover he was in Switzerland at the time. It must then have been my aunt!'

'Why should you trouble yourself to think about it? You are certain that it was not your cousin, and that is the main thing; it would be a pity that you and Bertram should start in life with any feeling of ill-will towards each other!'

'I am as certain that Joseph is as innocent in this matter as that I myself am innocent, and so would you be if you knew him. It is not that I think him so frank and generous a fellow that he would never plan secretly for

his own advantage, but I do not think that he would stoop to any underhand proceedings; he would like to feel that his superior intelligence had given him the power to wrest from others whatever he desired to obtain. In any case, our feelings towards each other are not of much importance, our paths in life will lie so far apart; after a little I must rejoin my regiment, and by the time it is ordered home Joseph will have formed his circle, of which I should only be an outsider.'

'No doubt, if you come back to India; but if you remain in England will not your path and his lie very much in the same direction?'

'If? . . . . But there is no "if" in the matter,' replied Alfred, smiling and changing the conversation.

The arrangements for his homeward journey were soon made, and he did not delay on the way; but another visitor—the inexorable King of Terrors—was journeying still more quickly towards Chiltern Park.

CHAPTER XIX.

Think but how vile a spectacle it were,
To view thy present trespass in another.
SHAKESPEARE.

MR. MEREDITH seemed to regain strength, revived as it were by the vanishing of the shadow which had darkened his life—the idea that he could never win affection from those who were dear to him—and he looked forward with joyous impatience to the moment when he should see his favourite again, and without the barrier of reserve which had before separated them. Perhaps that sudden light, with the various emotions that it re-awakened, was too much for his enfeebled frame: by degrees his new strength

waned, although he never again lost the brightness of expression which gave to his face an entirely new character. To Mrs. Bertram alone did there appear any sternness in it, and she could not help seeing that her brother avoided her. A guilty conscience made her fear that in some way or other Alfred was the cause of it, yet she felt almost certain that there had been no letter from him; she had closely watched the arrival of the post ever since the day of the lawyer's visit, and believed that the appearance of an Indian letter could not have escaped her.

It was summer-time, and although she had written to Joseph that his uncle was rapidly declining, Joseph showed no readiness to leave the pleasures of the London season for the seclusion of Chiltern Park. As there

appeared no immediate danger she did not know how to press him to come without expressing her fears that something was amiss between them and her brother, and this she hesitated to do, fearing to betray how she had planned to get Alfred out of the way. Yet it seemed hard to her to be obliged to suffer so much secret anxiety unshared by him for whom it was endured. One morning she met the post-boy in the avenue and asked if there were any letters for her. As he looked through those for 'the Park' she saw what she had so long watched for—an Indian letter!

A sudden paleness spread over her face, and crushing in her hand the two letters which the boy had given her for herself, she hurried back to the house.

Even in illness, and when unable to walk

without leaning upon his servant, Mr. Meredith was exact about appearing at meals, and when Mrs. Bertram entered the breakfast-room she found him there: impatiently she waited for some allusion to the letter, but as the time passed without any reference to it she became desperate and resolved to broach the subject.

'You have heard from Alfred, William?' she said as he was about to ring for Gray.

'Yes,' he replied, still keeping his hand on the bell beside him; 'but how did you know it?'

'I met the postman in the avenue, and as he gave me my letters I saw one for you with the Marseilles post-mark upon it, and supposed it must be from Alfred. Is he coming home on leave of absence?'

'I hope so, I have invited him here,' said

Mr. Meredith, ringing the bell and looking fixedly at her. 'Please to come to the library at twelve to-day, and, as you appear curious on the subject, you shall hear all that I have heard of and from him.'

Without waiting for any reply he took Gray's arm and walked feebly out of the room, leaving Mrs. Bertram in a state of pitiable consternation. There was nothing alarming in his words, but his manner as he desired her to come to the library—for it was rather a command than a request—caused her to shrink from the thought of what she was to hear; she did not dare, however, to disobey . . . .

The Rector was in the library as Mrs. Bertram entered at the appointed hour, and, having shaken hands with her, he said that Mr. Meredith wished him to read for her a

letter which he had received some time ago from his brother Dr. Mordaunt in India.

Mrs. Bertram had taken care to sit with her back to the light; there was no apparent nervousness in her manner when the reading of the letter was finished, and her brother evidently waited for her to speak.

'I am glad for your sake, William,' she said quietly, 'since it seems to give you pleasure, that Alfred professes to have valued your regard in spite of his conduct, which certainly seemed to indicate a very different feeling.'

'This conduct was produced by so delicate a shrinking from anything that could look like acting from interest that I do not wonder to hear you have failed to understand it,' replied Mr. Meredith, evidently much excited, yet without forgetting he was speaking to a

woman and his sister. 'I asked you to come here at this time, Caroline, that I might tell you in the presence of our revered friend—who knows all our family matters, and who from his sacred character must always be indulgent towards the faults of others—the painful discovery I have made of your attempt to prevent free communication between our brother's child and me. When I questioned Gray as to the cause of his having dared to deny me to anyone without my orders, and concealed from me that Alfred had asked for me twice on the morning of his departure, he was obliged at last to confess that you had desired him to do so, and enjoined upon him the strictest secrecy. Caroline, you have plotted with a servant to deceive me, and played upon my pride, my weakness! . . . .'

Mr. Meredith leaned his head upon his hand, overcome by the thought of his sister's duplicity.

'William, your accusation is unjustifiable,' exclaimed Mrs. Bertram, vehemently; 'your state of health, perhaps, and these highly-coloured accounts of Alfred's devotion to you —devotion hitherto so carefully disguised, through fear indeed of promoting his own advantage—may be some excuse for such distorted fancies, but they give you no right to insult me, and above all in the presence of one whose esteem I prize so highly!'

'Would that it could be shown that I have distorted fancies about your conduct, Caroline! The discovery of that unhappy affair with Gray did but light up a candle to the rest. It showed the meaning of your whole conduct in regard to Alfred: you feared that,

unless he could be rendered displeasing to me, I might make him my heir instead of your son; I would not have done so, I would have divided my property between them, had you not betrayed your own covetousness. In so doing however, you have brought out the noble and generous points of Alfred's character, and I have made him my heir; to your son I have left a sufficient legacy of thirty thousand pounds.'

Poor Mrs. Bertram! it was hard for her to hear that by her eagerness to secure the undivided inheritance for her son, she had deprived him of, at least, ten thousand a year, and caused him to be cut off with a comparatively insignificant legacy.

'Then you have acted most unfairly by Joseph,' she cried; 'you, tacitly at least, encouraged him to consider himself a man of

fortune, by allowing him to neglect his profession, and now you leave him a bare independence, without giving him any reason whatever for such a disappointment!'

'I have given you my reason, and if I did not send for him to hear this explanation, it is because I would not accuse a mother before her son, even were he a party to her fault.'

'But he was not,' she exclaimed, forgetting herself in her eagerness to exonerate Joseph; but the moment the words were uttered she became conscious that they were a fatal admission on her part, and losing her presence of mind she murmured piteously: 'Would to heaven I had never come to live in your house, and had allowed my child to trust to your honour to fulfil the expectations you had raised.'

'My honour has never yet been questioned by any one, Caroline,' interrupted Mr. Meredith, 'nor must you dare to question it. I requested Mr. Mordaunt to be present to-day, in order that he might judge between us; if however this is not sufficient, I will publicly state the cause of my displeasure and of my intentions towards you and Joseph. Neither you nor he, surely, have deserved well of me, since you have yourself admitted how much you have been calculating. To leave him a large fortune after this last discovery would be to reward you for wrong-doing. I wished indeed to leave it to you to tell Joseph of this change; now, however, I will write him a full explanation.'

'Oh, no, no; not to him; not to my son!' Unable to struggle any longer she covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

Mr. Meredith seemed to suffer almost as much as his sister, and the Rector, seeing his excessive agitation, interfered for the first time between them.

'You really must not give way so much, Mrs. Bertram,' he said kindly; 'through a natural but unregulated desire for your son's worldly prosperity you committed a grave fault, and this disappointment is the gentle punishment which Almighty God sends you; if you accept it as such it will lose all its bitterness; you must remember that, even as it is, a good portion is secured to your son, therefore, indeed, you ought to be grateful that your failing has not been more severely visited. Beyond our little circle here no one shall ever know of what has passed. It was especially to spare you any possible humiliation that Mr. Meredith retained Gray in his

service, since to have treated him with the severity he deserved, would have been to proclaim, at least to him, that you had done a grave wrong, and had not merely been anxious about your brother's peace of mind.'

'I will not stay here, I will go to London!' muttered Mrs. Bertram, standing up and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes.

'For your own sake, Caroline, remain,' said Mr. Meredith in a low voice; 'you cannot leave me now that my days are numbered, without publishing to the world that there has been a quarrel: if Joseph *asks* me for an explanation I must give it him.'

'Remain? Yes, a prisoner, because you make my son my gaoler; you are avenged, William!' and without another word she left the room.

'What a contrast to Mary and her boy!'

murmured Mr. Meredith, as if speaking to himself, and laying his hand feebly on Alfred's letter. 'Through my silly pride, always dreading that I should not be appreciated, I drove him away portionless; yet at last, when he hears that I am suffering, he conquers *his* pride, and, in order to give me pleasure, writes to me without knowing that I had already written to him, doing that which no privations could force him to do . . . Ah! now I shall die happy, if I am permitted to see him once more before I go to meet *her* in a better world, where misunderstanding can never enter . . . Will you read a little for me, Mr. Mordaunt?'

He leaned back in the chair listening to the gentle words which Mr. Mordaunt read . . . After a few minutes the sound of a quick sigh caused the Rector to look up, his friend had fainted.

CHAPTER XX.

Love on earth so feebly striving,
Lives divine in heaven again.—MISS PROCTOR.

MR. MEREDITH'S decline from that day was so rapid that, although Alfred was expected in a few weeks, it seemed doubtful that his uncle would have the gratification of embracing him in this world. To resign this hope was apparently the sacrifice demanded of Mr. Meredith, and the struggle was a hard one; the more so because, on the Tuesday which was destined to be the last of his life, there arrived a letter from Alfred dated in Paris, saying that he hoped to reach Chiltern Park by Wednesday evening. The physician,

however, said when he left the sick-room on the Tuesday morning that, humanly speaking, it was impossible for Mr. Meredith to survive the night, and the Rector did not think it right to conceal the sentence from his dying friend.

'So near, and yet too late!' murmered Mr. Meredith. 'Oh my God! Give me but one day more!'

'Neverthless, NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE! you mean to say,' added the Rector gently, but solemnly.

There was no audible reply, but the trembling lips seemed to form the words, 'I cannot.'

The Rector knelt down beside the bed, and for a long time neither spoke again. The convulsive movement of the poor invalid's emaciated hands, and the working of the

features, although the eyes were closed, showed how great was the bitterness of that last combat . . . Suddenly, however, with a degree of strength which he had not seemed capable of for several days, he sat up unassisted and looked slowly round the room, as if he were taking leave of all the old familiar objects.

'THY WILL, NOT MINE, BE DONE!' he then said in a low tone, and sank back upon the pillows. . . .

Joseph had been at Chiltern Park for six or eight days, yet his mother had not ventured to prepare him for the coming disappointment, except in so far as that she had told him before he left London that Alfred was returning, by invitation from his uncle. Alfred's letter announcing his arrival for the following day, and Mr. Meredith's

approaching death rendered him more than usually thoughtful on that evening, as he stood by the open window in the library waiting to be called to take a last farewell of the poor invalid.

He was fully alive to the fact that this reconciliation with Alfred was likely to cause a division of the inheritance, and it was a reflection especially disagreeable to him at that time: for as the supposed heir to the whole of the Meredith property he had aspired to the hand of Lady Maud Leeson, whose commanding style of beauty had inspired him with passionate admiration, as well as a desire for the triumph of winning one so difficult to subdue and so sought after. He fancied also that his chance of success was very good since she professed a worship for literary talent, and would turn away from

most of her other admirers to talk to him of his last new essay. It was, therefore, doubly provoking to him to lose part of his expected wealth, for he was too keen-sighted to believe that, as yet at all events, she felt for him any such preference as would render her indifferent to worldly advantages. Nevertheless, he thought that even with ten thousand a year he might succeed; nay more, as he stood there in the dim twilight he resolved that he *would* succeed—that one day or other Maud Leeson should be his wife, or——

The sound of a carriage driving up to the door suddenly interrupted his reverie; and to his amazement, he saw Alfred alight. He hurried down stairs, and was the first to meet his cousin; yet, before uttering a word of welcome, he looked steadily at the bronzed young soldier, who grasped his hand with

loyal warmth and whom he only remembered as a fair boy. Quick as lightning came the recollection of Alfred's old intimacy with the Waters', and there seemed a strange coincidence in his having appeared at the moment when Joseph vowed in his own mind to win Maud, in spite of every obstacle. 'Was he to be his rival in *her* favour, as in their uncle's?' And that glance had told him that his cousin was not one likely to be looked coldly upon by women. A defiant expression flashed into his face, but it was gone in a moment.

'How is uncle Meredith?' asked Alfred, noticing his cousin's silence. 'In his last letter before I started from Calcutta he spoke of not being strong.'

'Do you not know that he is dying?' replied Joseph. 'Is it not on that account

that you have come a day sooner than we expected you?'

Even Joseph, with all his cynicism, could not doubt the sincerity of Alfred's emotion—that this intelligence was a great shock and a great sorrow to him.

'Forgive me,' added Joseph, who was never needlessly cruel or relentless. 'I thought you must have been aware of it, and I did not know that you cared so much for him, or I would not have told you so abruptly. Come with me, and I will send word that you have arrived. Uncle Meredith has been longing for your coming, but I do not understand how you have arrived so opportunely.'

'After I had written I found that my friend was going on Monday morning, instead of evening—and such a mere chance is the

cause of my arriving in time,' said Alfred, in a low tone. 'Is the Rector here?'

'Yes, he is in my uncle's room.'

'Then will it not be better to send word that some one wishes to speak with him below stairs, and so prevent any sudden announcement of my arrival?'

'No doubt that will be the wisest plan,' replied Joseph, turning to the servant and desiring him to beg the Rector to come to the library.

CHAPTER XXI.

What are charity and generosity but the poetry and beauty of justice?—LORD LYTTON.

THE Rector re-entered the sick-room after a short absence. Mr. Meredith appeared to be in a stupor, in which the physician said he would probably pass away without any violent suffering, and his friend hesitated even to make an attempt to rouse him; yet remembering how much it had cost Mr. Meredith to accept the dread sentence without beholding once more his beloved nephew, it occurred to the good clergyman that Alfred's unhoped-for arrival looked like the earthly reward for that sacrifice, and he bent

down until his lips were close to the dying man's ear.

'Your prayer is granted, my poor friend,' he said gently. 'Alfred has arrived, and is waiting at the door to know if he may come in.'

The slight movement of the lips showed that Mr. Meredith had heard, although there was no audible answer; but at that moment Alfred entered the room, supposing he had given the Rector time enough to make all needful preparation for his coming, and, approaching the bed softly, he knelt down and kissed his uncle's forehead.

That touch seemed like an electric shock to the invalid: he opened his eyes, gazed fondly on Alfred's face, and made a feeble attempt to clasp his hand.

'Now, indeed, I am ready to die!' he

whispered. 'I can tell Mary that the last joy of my life was given to me by her child. . . . My God, I thank Thee!'

Mr. Meredith lingered for several hours afterwards, but he never spoke again. His death was a severe blow to Alfred, after travelling from India for the sole purpose of spending some time with his uncle; yet to have received such a welcome and farewell as his uncle's look and words, was a deeper gratification to him than anything else had ever been. The memory of that moment could never be effaced.

When he rose next morning, however, he could not help asking himself whose guest he was, Mrs. Bertram's or Joseph's? He had barely even spoken to his aunt as yet, and, considering her as the deliberate promoter of all misunderstanding between him and his

uncle, he resolved, if she acted as hostess, to ask the Rector to receive him until the funeral had taken place. He could not accept *her* hospitality.

A servant came to tell him that breakfast was served for him and Mrs. Bertram in the dining-room, and when he went down Joseph said that his mother was so unwell as to be unable to leave her room. Joseph was careful not to assume any appearance of ownership, and during the short meal he tried to make his cousin feel as much at home as himself.

'Well, Alfred,' he said, with a faint smile, as they stood up from the table, 'which of us is to act as regent, and give the necessary orders?'

Alfred looked at him in amazement. 'Which of us?' he replied. 'You mean, I

suppose, whether you or your mother ought to take the direction of the household for the present? Ladies do not count in these cases, you are the heir, are you not?'

'How can I tell until the will is read?' asked Joseph somewhat impatiently. 'Of course there is no question of the estates being left to my mother. You must have understood that I meant by "us" you or I.'

'I?' exclaimed Alfred, in unfeigned wonder. 'What needless formality to ask such a question. You will, of course, act as master even before you are so legally, and you will I hope let me be your guest until we have fulfilled the last duties to our poor uncle; afterwards I shall return to India. I have no occupation, and hardly any ties in England.'

'Do you not then expect that our uncle has

left you something? After the very full forgiveness he granted to you for having persisted in choosing your own profession, and after having invited you from such a distance, do you not suppose that he has given you a lasting proof of his recovered good-will?'

Joseph had watched his cousin's countenance closely as he spoke.

'He would have done so, no doubt, had he made his will after he had learned how we had been deceived in regard to each other, but I have never thought about the matter at all until now,' answered Alfred sadly. 'As I travelled homewards I looked forward to seeing him comparatively well, a little broken, perhaps, and the shock of his death banished every other feeling but sorrow.'

'And I dare say you think it very heartless of me to refer to these things now, but

it was necessary that somebody should act, and I did not like to assume, without consulting you, any power which you or others might think you have an equal right to. Besides *I* did not profess any lively affection for my uncle. I was grateful to him, and I tried to merit his approbation in every way, for I did think of my own interests and valued his favour accordingly, unlike you who defied him, and went your own way: and yet you became the darling, the one to be yearned and sighed for. Such is the justice of this world!'

There was a slight bitterness in Joseph's tone; his mother had said enough on that morning to disturb his mind about his own prospects, and he had endeavoured to discover if Alfred knew anything of the manner in which the property was disposed

of; but his ready and unrestrained answers could but result from complete ignorance, or consummate acting, and Joseph did not give his cousin credit for sufficient reflection and tact to be a good actor in such a case.

It had been decided that the will should be read on their return from the funeral, and the only persons present besides the two young men, were the lawyer and the Rector. Mrs. Bertram had not left her room since her brother's death, on the plea of not being well, which indeed was true, for disappointment and excitement had really broken her health.

By a strong effort, only, of his self-control did Joseph succeed in repressing any outward manifestation of the bitter anger that burned within him as he listened to the decree which shattered all his hopes, and rendered him

a comparatively poor man. Alfred's emotion was much more visible, yet it was marked more by excessive surprise than by satisfaction, and, in reality, he would have been better pleased had he only been left a part, instead of the whole, of Mr. Meredith's property. Neither, however, made any comment on the will until the lawyer had made his bow and retired.

'Joseph, this is incomprehensible to me as to you,' exclaimed Alfred as soon as the door was closed, 'and I hope you will let me indemnify you for any over-partiality shown to me by our uncle—produced, no doubt, by a feeling of reaction, of regret for having left me to struggle against difficulties for so many years—by making over to you at once, half of the property. The Rector will be a witness to my offer, and the arrangement

can be made quietly, without anyone, save ourselves and the lawyers, being aware that it was not so originally.'

'I never accept favours from those towards whom I cannot feel grateful,' answered Joseph coldly, 'and you surely do not suppose that I could ever feel grateful towards you, Alfred, who have come between me and all that I had a right to expect. Here is a specimen of the world's justice! As I have said, you defied your uncle, and he rewards you by leaving you the whole of his fortune! I did everything to please him, and he leaves me a paltry legacy; yet no doubt we shall hear him cried up as the most just of men, and one who never acted from caprice!'

'Nor did he,' interposed the Rector. 'Some weeks before his death he told Mrs. Bertram,

in my presence, what he had done, and gave her his reasons for so doing. Even in guarding his memory from undeserved censure, however, I must not forget how forbearing he was towards others, and therefore I will say no more on the subject, but refer you to Mrs. Bertram for all explanation.'

'There is nothing more idle than explanations in such a case as this, since they can in no way alter what has been done. . . . So the tables are turned, Alfred,' added Joseph, addressing his cousin; 'it is I who must ask you to give me hospitality until to-morrow.'

'Joseph, I do not want you to feel grateful towards me; I shall feel grateful to you if you will let me make the arrangement I proposed,' said Alfred abruptly, 'since I am convinced that if our uncle had believed you to be as free, as I believe you to be, from all

participation in any unworthy design to secure for yourself this whole inheritance, he would not have excluded you from a full share of it; therefore, I shall only carry out his real intentions. Will this not satisfy you?'

'No,' replied Joseph, after a moment's reflection and looking fixedly at Alfred, 'it can be nothing but a favour for you to make over to me the half of a property which by law is yours. A fluke has given you an immense advantage over me in the game of life; keep it, and leave me free to try my strength against you should I ever wish to do so!'

With a slight smile Joseph turned away and left the room, without waiting for any answer: he did not appear again until dinner-time.

'You surely know me well enough, Alfred,' Joseph said, when his cousin renewed the subject after the servants had retired, 'to feel certain that all attempt to persuade me to alter a determination is useless! It is wearisome; and must I tell you again, your offer does not even inspire me with gratitude? I can understand that you feel a kind of remorse for having, so to say, stepped into my shoes, although through no undue influence on your part, and that it would be a relief to your conscience to share this fortune with me. I am sorry that my pride and sense of independence will not permit me to afford you that satisfaction!'

Meanwhile Mrs. Bertram had naturally given her son as softened an account as she could of her own conduct, and blamed Alfred as far as it was possible, without saying

anything positively untrue. The consciousness that it would not be well to provoke an appeal to the Rector's testimony on these points made her very wary, yet she said enough to prejudice Alfred in Joseph's opinion, without, however, saving herself from her son's bitter displeasure.

'You are strangely mistaken as to my motives!' replied Alfred haughtily, but falling into his uncle's foible of not condescending to defend himself, and offering Joseph no explanation regarding his reconciliation with Mr. Meredith. 'In such a case as this it would be utterly impossible for the most sensitive conscience to experience any uneasiness. I thought of you alone in the matter—that you had been punished for another's fault, a fault of which I liked to think you were even ignorant, and therefore

I wished to make the arrangement I proposed.'

Alfred rose from the table and went out into the grounds alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

Days of music and of beauty,
With a golden halo bright.—S. F. R.

It was New Year's eve, and at Thor Abbey in one of the border counties, the residence of Mr. Haggerston, a goodly company of ladies and gentlemen were assembled, to 'dance *out* the old and *in* the new year.'

The Abbey had been built by Benedictine monks, who evidently considered that everything ought to be grand and vast in a house dedicated to their Master's service. The greater part of the building had been modernised, the refectory alone remaining in its former state. It had probably escaped

mutilation on account of its architectural beauty, and its spacious proportions rendered it useful as a banqueting-hall, or ball-room, and here Mr. Haggerston, who represented one of the old English Catholic families and clung to the customs of the past, always celebrated the great festivals of 'Merrie Englande in ye olden time.'

At each end of this vast apartment there was a spacious fire-place, in which now blazed and crackled huge logs of wood, shedding a ruddy glare upon the branches of holly and other evergreens with which the great hall was tastefully decorated. About the middle of the side wall, over the place were the reading-desk originally stood, was suspended the branch of mistletoe; a charmed circle was drawn upon the highly-polished floor beneath it, and all the fair damsels caught within that

circle were obliged to remain prisoners there until they had consented to pay the ransom.

Separated from the dancers by the massive pillars which lined the room, and at a little distance from the fire-place at the upper end, in an old-fashioned high-backed arm-chair, was seated the Lady Maud Leeson, surrounded by a group of admirers. Lord Moyston stood behind her chair, leaning over with a slight pretension of intimacy; by her side sat an aspiring young poet looking 'unutterable things,' but too much absorbed in the world of his own thoughts to take much part in the general conversation—he wanted all Maud's attention for himself, and did not like that others should share even in her smiles; on the other side stood a young cavalry officer, who took no pains whatever to conceal his admiration.

Maud was just twenty, in the full bloom of stately beauty, and so accustomed to admiration that she hardly cared for it, save as a proof that others were occupied about her. The reputation for superior talent which the world gave her she did value, however, and she merited it to a certain degree, yet she was, perhaps, a little too full of herself to have acquired any real knowledge, although good breeding saved her from the weakness of talking much about herself. It is true that there are persons who never speak, yet are always thinking, about themselves. She had declined to dance, declaring that she was reserving herself for Sir Roger de Coverly, when she and Mr. Haggerston intended to dance out all the other couples; and now, pleased to see that she could hold so many captive at her side, in spite of the attractions

of a waltz on a perfect floor, she looked all brightness and animation.

'Will you come to see the skating to-morrow, Lady Maud?' asked the officer, who was proud of his proficiency as a skater, an art which he had acquired whilst quartered in Canada.

'I don't know, I fancy that the fireside, with an agreeable companion or book, would be more attractive than the prospect of shivering on the banks of a lake, even for the purpose of admiring your graceful prowess on the ice!' replied Maud, with a pretty air of derision.

'Perhaps Lady Maud does not care to experience a new sensation,' said Lord Moyston; 'and to be called upon to admire would, no doubt, be rather new to her.'

'But we shall not ask her to make acquain-

tance with the active form of that verb, we only ask her to come among us and be herself the object of it, as usual,' replied Major Belmont. 'We will make a sledge for you, Lady Maud, and try to prove to you that an excursion on the ice may surpass even the attractions of a bright fire; for the perfect enjoyment of either, I should say an agreeable companion is an indispensable requisite.'

'But what would constitute an agreeable companion for Lady Maud?' sighed the poet. 'Even in the abstract, in what does *agreeability* consist?'

'I'll tell you,' answered Lord Moyston; 'it consists in lightly, but skilfully, skimming the surface of each subject, never going deep enough to require any effort on the part of others to answer or accept what you advance. Only a few veteran mariners find pleasure in

grappling with the sea when it puts forth any real strength; many of the better sort, no doubt, would rather have it a little ruffled than in a dead calm, since in this latter state there would be no scope for even an easy display of their own dexterity.'

'Now, Sir poet, let us have your notion of *agreeability*,' said Maud, turning towards him; 'afterwards, perhaps Major Belmont will give us his, and we shall have the advantage of hearing three very different definitions—the diplomatic, the poetic, and the military.'

'Will you promise to crown it by that of fair woman, Lady Maud, and we shall not shrink from the test?' asked Major Belmont.

'Who is that gentleman leaning against the pillar at the other end of the room?' exclaimed Maud, abruptly, and forgetting all about the definitions.

'What a happy fellow he is to attract your notice—at that distance too! Do you then think him so handsome?' said Major Belmont, looking superciliously at the object of Maud's interest. He was himself considered a beau.

'I was not thinking about his good looks,' replied Maud, impatiently; 'but he is so like, so very like, an old playmate of mine whom I have not seen for years!'

'He is more than like, he *is* Alfred Meredith,' said Lord Moyston, coldly. 'I knew him at once, although I had no idea that he was in the neighbourhood. It does not say much for his remembrance of old friendship that he should be here without the knowledge of you or your brother, Lady Maud! He has not then been to see you, although he is free now? He left the service, did he

not, on receiving the windfall of Chiltern Park?'

'Oh, that is young Meredith of Chiltern Park, who came in so unexpectedly for a large fortune, after having won no end of distinction in India?' asked Major Belmont, turning to look at Alfred. 'An officer who was there at the time now belongs to our regiment, and I have often heard him say there never was a more gallant thing done than his defence of the wounded near Mungur. After this, it seems, Meredith became such a lion, that many of the most courted girls were wild about him, and would have been only too glad to marry him, notwithstanding his acknowledged dependence upon his pay alone. But, would you believe it, although he was said to be no laggart at a flirtation, the first symptoms of any matrimonial expecta-

tions scared him away at once? It was naturally supposed that the image of some charmer at home must have rendered him so callous to all the attractions of beauty and fortune. Eh? Lady Maud!' added the Major, gazing fixedly at her.

Maud's eyes sparkled, but she answered quietly: 'Very probably. I could, however, know nothing about such matters in those days. I was not much more than fifteen when Alfred Meredith went to India.'

'Yet, even then, Lady Maud was not a child, nor wholly unskilled in the art of coquetry,' said Lord Moyston a little bitterly. 'Do you remember the illumination of the boat-house?'

'Yes, and your defeat at the boat-race,' she retorted. 'Oh, it is Waters who is speaking to him, and Mr. Haggerston also.

I wonder what they are talking about so long?'

'So your ladyship *can* be eager, after all,' said Lord Moyston, with a forced smile. 'For your sake I am glad to say they seem to be moving this way; and sorry for my own that those few bars of the Lancers remind me of an engagement.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

Liberty ! No wonder that the peoples are in chains if the apostles of their freedom think to serve them thus.—OUIDA.

THE poet had already disappeared. It was too much for him to sit there ignored and even forgotten, whilst the sudden appearance of an old playfellow had been able to fix all Lady Maud's attention ; and Major Belmont only waited to get a full view of the young Indian hero as he came up with Lord Waters and their host.

'I have had such a disappointment, Lady Maud,' said Mr. Haggerston, preceding the others by a few steps. 'I thought to have had the honour of introducing to you the

gallant Captain Meredith, and I find that he is a very old friend of yours. He arrived this afternoon on a visit to his relations, the Hiltons, and they induced him to accompany them here, although he did not know the pleasure reserved for him in meeting you and Lord Waters.'

'*Caed milla faltha!*' said Maud, standing up and holding out her hand to Alfred with a bright smile. 'But perhaps you no longer understand such expressions. India, and all your success, have, perhaps, banished the remembrance of everything Irish.'

'*You* are Irish!' replied Alfred, in a tone meant only to reach her ears: and adding aloud: 'The greater absorbs the lesser; therefore the remembrance of Ireland and all its familiar expressions is far more vivid to me than anything of India. Why, Waters

considers me so nearly a countryman that he has already proposed to me to go into parliament and support the rebel party!'

'Come, Meredith, you must not give us bad names,' interrupted Lord Waters; 'even Mr. Haggerston, with all his conservatism, must admit that Ireland is an oppressed country.'

'Oppressed, indeed,' replied Mr. Haggerston, 'there is no doubt of that; we shall differ only as to the oppressors. I am a firm disciple of the great Comte de Maistre on one subject, at least, and believe with him that "Every nation has the government it deserves." The oppressors are probably your own selves.'

'You do not know here in England what our clergy have to contend against!'

At the present time I doubt if the Church is as free in any part of Christendom as

in the British dominions—free to exercise all the necessary functions of religion—free to communicate with the Chief and Centre of her visible unity—free to receive and name bishops and priests, to establish schools, churches and convents, by natives or by foreigners. I do not know any country where the same liberty now exists. If Cæsar is not for us he certainly is not against us. St. Peter is not even a missionary amongst us, still less is he a prisoner. He is free to feed his Master's lambs and His sheep. He does not, in England, sleep "between two soldiers, bound with two chains," and with keepers before the door of his prison; we have a Hierarchy without a Concordat and a minister of public worship. What can surpass the absurdity then of a Frenchman, for instance, sympathising with an Irishman about

his suffering under religious persecution? A captive behind his prison bars pitying a free man for being able to walk at large! . . . And you ask them to pity you as a people oppressed on account of your religion? Fie! fie! It is too unworthy.'

'We must talk no more then of the "wrongs" of Ireland and English oppression, under pain of being called uncharitable and unchristian? You will find it very difficult to persuade the Irish clergy of this, I fancy.'

'So much the worse for them, if so it be; and above all, so much the worse for their unhappy people! since, in the eyes of the multitude, their political partisanship—*which is purely a matter of fallible opinion*—but too often takes a character of the divine doctrine

of which they are the ordained teachers. The instructed know that the Church commands no political creed, save love, honour, and obedience to "the powers that are"—to the government under which her children live. It is the boast of the Irish clergy that their sheep hear their voice; is it not at the same time a scandal in Christendom to find these distinguished by hatred, opposition, disaffection, and even rebellion, towards their rulers? If it were not an evil, a crime in itself, what has this hatred to "the powers that are" ever produced, but its natural consequence, namely suffering? What good has ever resulted therefrom, to religion, to society, to a single individual?'

'I must confess to you that the feeling which you condemn is very prevalent

in Ireland, and deeply rooted. I have hitherto taken it for granted, and thought it justifiable and praiseworthy—against the counsel of older, and, perhaps, wiser heads than my own—although I have often felt that it is useless, and prejudicial to the actual comfort of the people. It is but too true that this discontent is rather encouraged than rebuked amongst us. I begin to feel that it is a more serious evil than I had supposed, for I do not hear these opinions for the first time. My father would probably have agreed with all you have said.'

'*Deo gratias!* Permit an old friend of your father to tell you in his name, that you will do more for the spread of truth, and freedom which is its fruit, by a single act of Christian loyalty, than all your complainings have ever done. There is reason enough to

"weep sore" for Ireland; but "the night is far spent, the day is at hand." Religion is dawning again upon us in all its splendour. You also will awake from your sleep; you will learn again that there can be no liberty where there is no "attachment, gratitude, and submission" to the government under which we live; that "there are no rights without duties," that "liberty consists in doing what we like whilst doing what we ought to do;" you also will deliver yourselves from the bondage of *hatred*, and be ready to work with us for the good and righteous cause.'

'If anything more than another could detach me from what I have thought to be the interests of my country it would be the hateful outrages approved of by those who

profess to support those principles which I have believed in; but—'

'Ah, Dick, your dear father's prophecy is coming true,' interrupted Alfred, recalled on overhearing these words to the evening when the late Lord Waters told him of his son's intention to enter parliament in the 'Liberal' interest; and, seeing that Maud was beginning to look a little uneasy at this tête-à-tête, he seized the opportunity of breaking in upon his friend's conversation. 'The young Irelanders who broke O'Connell's heart have nearly succeeded in disgusting you also.'

'Have you then been listening very attentively to the discussion into which the "wail of the oppressed" betrayed us? It seemed to me when I chanced to look your

way that you were quite as busily engaged yourself,' said Mr. Haggerston, smiling.

'I was endeavouring to make my peace with Lady Maud for not having paid my first visit to Maurpton Castle,' answered Alfred, trying to look unconscious. 'During the late summer and autumn, my mourning was too recent to permit me to join the numerous company there; and since then the Waters' have not been at home, so I fancied I deserved forgiveness for an involuntary fault.'

'And no doubt you have obtained it,' said Lord Waters; 'I granted you mine at once, and Maud is not always inexorable.'

'No indeed, I think I have been very forgiving to—to Captain Meredith, after his slight to his old playmates; and ladies

especially do not like to be slighted,' she added with an arch look, 'since I assured him I would have granted his petition to be my partner for Sir Roger de Coverly had I not a previous engagement for it before which even the claims of a returned Indian hero were as nothing to me,' and a gay glance designated Mr. Haggerston.

'You see that grey hairs and the title of grandfather are not to be despised, young gentleman,' said Mr. Haggerston, 'since they win for one the privilege of receiving such pretty compliments from the lips of beauty. But I will not trespass on my privilege, and, although I cannot forego the honour of leading off Sir Roger with Lady Maud, I will yield my place to Captain Meredith after we have danced down the lines for the first time.'

'And you expect me to be pleased with that arrangement?' asked Maud, pretending to frown. 'If you pay me so poor a compliment as to desert me in that way I shall be too greatly mortified to dance any more!'

'Such is the way of the world!' laughed Mr. Haggerston; 'when I offer to make a real sacrifice for your greater good you accuse me of indifference! But perhaps Captain Meredith will be able to persuade you that if you are mortified, however unjustly, the best way to hide it will be to dance on as if you were enjoying yourself far more than before . . . And now I must leave you, I have been too long forgetful of my duties as a host.'

Aspirants for a dance with Maud, who had

hesitated to approach whilst the little quartette were so deeply engaged in conversation, now came to claim her, and she was soon lost in the crowd of waltzers.

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